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"Great writers"

"Great Writers."

EDITED BY

PROFESSOR ERIC S. ROBERTSON, M.A.

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*LIFE OF VICTOR HUGO.*

# LIFE

OF

# VICTOR HUGO

BY

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LONDON
WALTER SCOTT
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# NOTE.

THE reader would thank me very little for enumerating here all the books and periodicals consulted during the composition of this short biography. My sheaf, comparatively small as it is, has been gleaned from many fields. Two debts, however, I feel in honour bound to acknowledge, one to Madame Hugo's "Victor Hugo raconté par un Témoin de sa vie," and the other to M. Biré's "Victor Hugo avant 1830."

F. T. M.

# LIFE OF VICTOR HUGO.

## CHAPTER I.

THERE are some men round whose name and fame and work it would almost seem as if human opinion were destined to rage in never-ending strife. Such a man was Victor Hugo. For upwards of sixty years he remained conspicuous among his contemporaries, an object of passionate admiration, and almost equally passionate dislike. During the earlier portion of that period he stood in the forefront of the great battle between the Romantic and Classical schools in French literature. To his followers he was the man of men, the "impeccable master," the genius of his age, a kind of sun-god dispelling the drear darkness of poetic routine and ancient night. To his adversaries he was a mere savage, a monster, rudely violating his mother tongue, and setting all sane traditions at defiance. Then, when that battle had in a measure fought itself out, came even fiercer warfare in the world of politics. The Revolution of 1848, fitful, sudden, erratic, drove Louis Philippe from the throne of France. A short-lived Republic followed. But in the Republic was soon visible what some hailed as the dawn, and others cursed as the coming night of

Imperialism. Among those who cursed was Victor Hugo, and his talents in that kind were simply magnificent. What winged words, tipped with venom and flame, did he not discharge at Napoleon III.! And how cordially the Imperialists hated him in return! But even when the Empire had been swept into the dust-heap of human failures — even then, amid the shouts that hailed the poet as the laureate of French democracy, discordant voices might still be heard. Not yet had unanimity been reached. A new literary school arose professing to be neither classical nor romantic, but "naturalist." Facts, realism, science, such were, and are, the watchwords of M. Zola and his Comus-rout. Weighed in a balance that takes no account of what is ideal, or beautiful, or sublime, no wonder if Victor Hugo's work is found lighter than vanity itself. He is arraigned for artificiality, for preferring an epic grandeur to the actual proportions of life, and ridiculed for his mediæval "bric-à-brac," his empty, sonorous rhetoric. "He never followed after truth," such is M. Zola's conclusion; "he was never the man of his age." And if this be the verdict of the last coarse school in French literature, how does his reputation stand among daintier critics of an approved Atticism, like M. Scherer and Mr. Matthew Arnold? The latter praises Sainte-Beuve for having early "seized the weak side of Victor Hugo's poetry," its "emptiness," "theatricality," "violence," and quotes, as "a description never to be forgotten of Victor Hugo as a poet," the statement of Sainte-Beuve that he was a "Frank, energetic and subtle, who had mastered to perfection the technical and rhetorical resources of

the Latin literature of the decadence." After this, if one has been watching the battle-field at all impartially, one is glad to see a bold, or it may be even a rash, diversion in the poet's favour; one is glad to see Mr. Swinburne swinging down upon the enemy in full charge, and to hear him shouting his mighty war-cry in praise of the "great master whose name is the crowning glory of the nineteenth century," of the "greatest writer whom the world has seen since Shakespeare," "the greatest Frenchman of all time"!

Thus for upwards of sixty years has the strife of tongues raged round Victor Hugo. And it is a strife in which whosoever speaks of him at all is almost constrained to take a part. The man was pre-eminently a fighter. How is it possible to avoid controversy in discussing his life and works? So with every desire, as far as in me lies, to live peaceably with all men, I cannot but feel that before faring very far forward, I too shall be drawn into the conflict; and, standing as it were upon the battle's brink, I almost hesitate.

"This century of ours was two years old, the Sparta of the Republic was giving place to the Rome of the Empire, and Bonaparte the First Consul developing into Napoleon the Emperor, . . . when, at Besançon, . . . there came into the world a child of mingled Breton and Lorraine blood, who was colourless, sightless, voiceless, and so poor a weakling that all despaired of him except his mother. . . . That child, whose name Life appeared to be erasing from its book, and whose short day of existence seemed destined to pass into night with never a morrow—

that child am I." Thus, in lines which most Frenchmen know pretty well by heart, has Victor Hugo related the incidents of his birth. To put the matter more prosaically, he was born at Besançon, in the extreme east of France, on February 26, 1802.

His father, Joseph Léopold Sigisbert Hugo, was an officer in the French army, and aged some twenty-nine years at the time of Victor's birth. Under what circumstances he had become a soldier is not quite clear. His own memoirs—for he too wielded the pen, and has left memoirs — are somewhat reticent on the point. The family record suggests that he first embraced the career of arms in 1788 as a "cadet." My own impression is that he entered the ranks quite humbly as one of the numerous volunteers who, at the approach of the Revolution, came forward to do its work and defend the country. Be that as it may, in 1793-4 we find him already a captain—for among good republicans promotion was rapid in those days—and actively engaged in the war against the royalists of La Vendée. He has changed his name to "Brutus," which is a sign of the times, and helps to memorialise the Convention in denunciation of the Girondists, and in praise of "the sublime Constitution" of 1793; and he "swears," in common with his co-signatories, to "shed the very last drop of his blood to crush all tyrants, fanatics, royalists, and federalists." He is also somewhat busily engaged as secretary to the military commissions which are condemning the unhappy royalists to death, or purveying victims for the infamous Carrier's revolutionary tribunal at Nantes. Dirty work at best, and there seems no

reason to doubt that he hates it, and does what in him lies—as he claims for himself, and Madame Hugo claims for him—to mitigate the horrors of that fratricidal war. Thence, the rising in La Vendée being crushed, he is transferred to Paris, and employed for some two years in semi-military semi-legal work at the War Office; and thence again passes to the Army of the Rhine, under Moreau, and is attached to the personal staff of that great general, who for a time almost seems to be the predestined rival of the rising young Napoleon. Such is Victor Hugo's father, who, after a creditable, and one may almost say distinguished military career, is commanding his battalion at Besançon in 1802.

As to the boy's mother, she had had, if we may trust a passage in the preface to "Les Feuilles d'Automne," a troubled childhood; had been a *brigande*, as the insurgent royalists were called, "like Madame de Bonchamp and Madame de Larochejaquelein," and had been compelled to "fly," she, "a poor girl of fifteen," across the ensanguined fields of "the Bocage." But here, I think, some little allowance must be made for poetic licence. M. Trébuchet, the father of this young lady, was a shipowner at Nantes; and we are told, on the excellent authority of his granddaughter,[1] that he was "one of those honest citizens who never travel beyond the confines of their own city, and of their once settled

[1] The reference here, and throughout, when I quote from Madame Hugo, is to her "Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie," which was clearly written under Victor Hugo's own eye, and may almost be treated as his autobiography. It is re-published in the complete edition of his works.

opinion." Clearly not the man to go careering about the Bocage with his three motherless daughters, or to allow one of them to take what the French call "the key of the fields" on her own account. Moreover, I think we may regard it as pretty certain that Madame Hugo, with her skill in selecting the picturesque points in the family history, would not have neglected so striking an episode, unless it had lain beyond the confines of fact, and in the cloudland of legend or imagination. Still, though Mademoiselle Trébuchet may never have borne arms in her own person, she was a royalist, and the daughter of a royalist; and there must have been many obstacles to the wooing of the handsome young republican officer, who, in his frequent visits to Nantes, hovered about the dovecote of the worthy ship-owner. "Love," however, here again, was "lord of all," as in the far-off days when the English lady "would marry the Scottish knight." Sigisbert Hugo, for the now obsolete "Brutus" had been dropped, held to his suit. Sophie Trébuchet was nothing loath. Her father suffered himself to be persuaded, consented even to leave Nantes for a time, and take his daughter to Paris, where the bridegroom elect was, for the nonce, driving the clerkly quill at the War Office. So all went well. The marriage took place in 1796. A first-born son, Abel, came into the world, at Paris, on the 15th November, 1798; a second, Eugène, was born at Nancy on the 16th of September, 1800; and Victor followed on the 26th of February, 1802.

Having thus spoken of the poet's father and mother, perhaps a word may fittingly be said of his ancestry. Whereupon I enter at once into the strife of tongues.

According to Madame Hugo, to Victor Hugo himself, to M. Barbou, Victor Hugo's enthusiastic biographer, the Hugos were a noble family, "illustrious both in literature and in arms," and Madame Hugo half apologizes for not carrying their genealogy further back than 1532, saying that all earlier records had perished at the pillage of Nancy, in 1670. Now that there was a noble family of Hugos is indisputable. Unfortunately there is nothing to show that our Hugos were in any way connected with them. M. Biré, who has gone into this matter with great care and minuteness, establishes the point pretty conclusively. Victor's father was a soldier who had entered the army as a volunteer at the outset of the Revolution. He speaks of his own people as *honnêtes gens*, which may be regarded as the equivalent of worthy and respectable. As a matter of fact they belonged to the upper artisan class. The poet's grandfather was a carpenter. Three of his aunts were sempstresses; one was married to a baker; another to a hair-dresser. It is scarcely possible, as Madame Hugo asserts, that five of his uncles should have fallen in battle at Weissenbourg, for there were but five altogether, and three lived till long after the date of that engagement. Nor, I repeat, is there anything whatever to connect all these worthy people with the knights and esquires, privy counsellors, and bishops of the — I was going to say other branch, but it should rather be other tree of the Hugos. There is evidence, on the contrary, to show that no connection existed.

And here, perhaps, the judicious reader may be tempted to ask, "What can all this possibly matter? Grant that the poet's origin was more humble than has

hitherto been supposed, and that, instead of coming from a class which even its admirers would admit to have become somewhat effete at the end of the eighteenth century, he sprang from a race of sturdy and energetic artisans—grant all this, and how can it affect him injuriously? In default of ancestral honour may not a man like Victor Hugo claim the greater honour of being himself an ancestor, and rooting, as it were, a mighty and perdurable name?" True, most true. But not quite the point here at issue. If the poet had said nothing about his family, no one else would have said anything about it either. But he did say something, and that something was neither accurate in statement nor suggestion; and, unfortunately, inaccuracies of a similar kind exist throughout his works. Here is the crux. Here is the question which the biographer cannot blink—a question similar in kind to that which has to be faced by the admirers of Chateaubriand and Shelley and Goethe, and various other great men. Did Victor Hugo knowingly palter with fact? Did he advisedly, and in full knowledge of what he was doing, present it in a light that was not the light of truth? Genius is quite compatible with charlatanism, else were we led to the conclusion, too evidently absurd, that the great Napoleon was no genius. Are we compelled by the verities of criticism to believe that there was a baser alloy of quackery mingled with the fine gold of the genius of Victor Hugo? Such is the problem; and before I have done I shall have to endeavour to find some solution to it. But that must be further on in our story, and when we have collected additional materials

on which to found a sane and equitable judgment. Meanwhile it will be fitting to return to the birth-place and birth-time of the little weakling child, whose future career was to suggest these delicate ethical questions.

We left him at Besançon on the 26th of February, 1802, the doctor declaring that he could not live, the mother fully determined that he *should* live,—and prevailing. Not thus, in what Hood, the unrivalled punster, called "Babbicome Bay" and "Port Natal," was the argosy that carried the child's superb fortunes to be wrecked—not thus, prematurely, was to close a career destined to be remarkable for its magnificent vitality. "Victor Marie," so was the boy christened; and the name proved of happy augury. In his first fight he came off victor over death. Within six weeks he had so far gained strength as to be able to bear removal to Marseilles; and thence, though still very delicate, he was taken about to Corsica and Elba, from station to station, in the wake of a wandering military father.

"Blood and iron"! Prince Bismarck himself might have been satisfied if he had lived during the first fifteen years of this century; for the times were certainly of iron, and blood ran without stint. As we think of the great battle-field that Europe then was, and listen to the echoes that history brings to us, we almost seem to hear again the roar of the old cannon, and the tramp of armed men, and the wail of those who mourn for their dead. And if such be the impression which Napoleon's campaigns still produce on us, who live in these later days, and have heard the rumour of other armies marching and counter-marching, and the crash of other empires in

their fall—what must have been the impression made on an ardent, imaginative boy, himself partly nurtured in the camp, and whose father was daily staking his life in the great war game? The poet has told us, and with some pomp and circumstance, in one of his earlier odes, how his cradle had oft been rested on a drum, and water from the brook brought to his childish lips in a soldier's helmet, and how the glorious tatters of some worn-out flag had been wrapped round him in his sleep. Without accepting this quite literally, we may yet, I think, easily picture to ourselves how the boy was influenced by the varied experiences, journeyings, and anxieties of his earlier years. Surely the fierce war-goddess, then crying havoc over the ravaged fields of Europe, was, in her strange wild way, no unfit "nurse for a poetic child."

Memory plays strange pranks with us all, and often hoards with a miser-like tenacity some worthless odd and end, while she squanders real treasure like a prodigal. Victor's first recollection comes strangely, and yet with a sort of "touch of nature," among the stirring incidents of his boyhood. His father had gone off, in 1805, to join the army in Italy under Masséna. His mother had brought her little brood to Paris. And here he remembered—it was the first dawn-streak on the horizon of his mind—how he used to go to school with his brother, and how, being a very tiny and very frail scholar, he would mostly be taken, on arrival at school in the early morning, to the bedroom of Mademoiselle Rose, the schoolmaster's daughter, and how, perched up on her bed, he would watch her at her toilet. But soon matters of graver import began to find a place in his memory.

His father, after doing good service under Masséna, had passed into the army of Joseph Bonaparte, then King of Naples; had tracked and captured Fra Diavolo, the famous brigand chief, tracked him almost literally like a hare; and had been rewarded with the command of a regiment and the governorship of the province of Avellino. Peace, or something like peace, reigned in Southern Italy; and Madame Hugo set off, at the end of October, 1807, to rejoin her husband. So little Victor journeyed, in the dear, tedious, lumbering old *diligences* of those days, across a rain-soddened France, and then—in a sledge for the nonce—through the snows of the Mont Cenis Pass, and then, in *diligences* again, by Parma, and Florence, and Rome the Imperial City, and Naples with her peerless bay, and so on to Avellino. Alexandre Dumas, the great Alexandre, most charming of narrators, has devoted several chapters of those light bright memoirs of his to the history of Victor Hugo's childhood and youth; and he bears witness, from conversations held forty years afterwards, to the singular faithfulness of the impressions left on the child's mind by that Italian journey. On one point we scarcely need his assurances or those of Madame Hugo. Both tell us how much the little traveller was affected by the dismal spectacle of the bodies of executed brigands, hanging from the trees at pretty frequent intervals along the road. All through life every form of capital punishment—gibbet or guillotine—retained for him a kind of morbid fascination. There is, in his house at Guernsey, a picture grisly and horrible, executed by himself, showing a poor human body, the body of John Brown, the negro liberationist, "hanged

by the neck" till it seems reduced by time and the weather's indignities to mere shreds and tatters of what once was man. Among the most powerful passages in "L'Homme qui rit"—indeed I think the most powerful—is the description of the corpse hanging in chains on the top of Portland Bill, and terrifying poor little Gwynplaine by the execution of a hideous dance to the wintry pipings of the wind.

At Avellino life went very pleasantly. As governor of the province, Col. Hugo occupied a marble palace, all fissured, it is true, by a recent earthquake, but not the less enchanting on that account to the eyes and fancy of childhood. Then there was a deep wooded ravine in close proximity, and there were nuts to heart's desire, and—charm of charms to the natural boy!—no lessons, nothing to dim the cloudless blue of perfect idleness. So the three little Hugos enjoyed halcyon days with their kind father in the sunny South, amid the mountains and gorges of Avellino; but days all too short, and flitting almost with the rapidity of the halcyon's wing. Kings were "on promotion" at that time. Joseph Bonaparte, after reigning over Naples till June, 1808, was placed by his imperious no less than imperial brother upon the Spanish throne, which had just been iniquitously wrested from the reigning Bourbons. Col. Hugo stood high in Joseph's favour. When the latter moved to Madrid, Col. Hugo received an honourable and pressing invitation to follow. Such a proposal was by no means to be refused. As a known adherent of the disgraced Moreau, or for other reasons which have been variously explained, the Colonel had little to expect

from Napoleon, and it was clearly his policy to remain attached to the Bonaparte, who appreciated his services. But Spain, with her national pride excited to blood-heat, was as yet no place for the education of three French boys, or the residence of a French lady. Again did it become necessary for father and children to part. So sorrow reigned on either side, and the lads turned their faces towards Paris very sadly.

Madame Hugo, the elder, if we may credit her daughter-in-law's testimony, entertained no great admiration for the beauties of nature, and had watched the Alps and the Apennines with some indifference. But she liked a garden; and attached to the house which she took shortly after her return to Paris, was a garden that was more than a garden, that was a park, a wood, a piece of the country dropped into the midst of the great city, a place of enchantment, a very Broceliande, where magicians might weave their spells, and monsters lurk in secret places, and knights and ladies wander at will, and everything unforeseen and unexpected happen quite naturally. In this place of delight, which had belonged in pre-revolution days to the convent of the Feuillantines, the three boys were as happy as the exigencies of education would allow. Abel, the eldest, was now old enough to go as a boarder to the Lycée, or public school; and Eugène and Victor were sent to a somewhat humble day-school not far from their home, and kept by a certain Larivière,—a worthy pedagogue, formerly a priest, whom the Reign of Terror had unfrocked and frightened into marriage. But in play-time, and especially on Sundays, when Abel had his weekly holiday, what pleasures did

the garden not offer! Thither too would come not unfrequently, taking her gentler part in the boys' rougher games, the little lady whom the poet afterwards married. No wonder that the sunshine of the old place lived so bright in his memory.

And besides the tenants with which the imagination of these bright children peopled the dainty wilderness and the ruined ecclesiastical buildings of the Feuillantines, there was a tenant in flesh and blood to whom attached an interest quite as romantic. This was General Lahorie, Victor's godfather. For General Lahorie, an old friend and companion in arms of General Hugo, lay here in hiding. He was one of the officers implicated in Moreau's conspiracy against Napoleon, and had been condemned to death,[1] as we are told—but I think that extreme penalty must have been commuted—and then tracked from one place of refuge to another, till at last Madame Hugo had generously afforded him sanctuary in a ruined chapel in her garden. Here he appears to have remained some eighteen months, and was to the boys the pleasantest of companions. He would tell them numberless stories, "true stories," doubtless, of adventure and peril "i' the imminent deadly breach," stories calculated to fire their young blood, and make them long for the time when they too should be old enough to handle sword or musket. He would also go over their lessons in the evening, and read Tacitus with little Victor, now a progressing and very advanced young scholar of nine or ten. Ought we

[1] Condemned in his absence, as is possible according to French law.

also to believe that he first lit in that young gentleman's mind the bright pure flame of democratic republicanism —a flame destined to smoulder there for a time, and afterwards to burst forth as a beacon to the nations? We ought to believe this, or something like it, for Victor Hugo tells us so, and represents the general, in a very striking passage, as saying "fit things" on liberty, and on Napoleon as liberticide, while overhead the illuminations of some imperial fête were bravely flaring. But, alas, that critics should be so troublesome! Why can they not, according to Lord Melbourne's recommendation, "let it alone"? M. Biré, I fear, makes it very difficult for us to give full credence to this pretty story.

Whether or not General Lahorie held the antithetical conversation reported by his godson, certain it is that the days went pleasantly by in the house and garden of the Feuillantines. And beating as it were round the happy shores of childhood, adding a kind of zest to the brightness and mirth, were the ceaseless wild surges of battle. Wars and rumours of wars, these sent their voices continually into that joyous home. Now the boys would be listening to such bulletins of the imperial campaigns as the Government vouchsafed to impart to its lieges—bulletins that spoke of successes very often, and of reverses never at all, and were not altogether quite ingenuous perhaps. Then would come the visit of a colonel uncle, all resplendent in gold lace, and producing on his little nephews, so Victor tells us, the effect of Michael the archangel, as seen in glory. He too might have tales to tell of even newer combats than those described by General Lahorie. There would also be

letters at fairly frequent intervals from General Hugo, now higher than ever in Joseph's favour, and busily engaged, among other battlings, in tracking the guerilla chief, El Empecinado, as he had before tracked Fra Diavolo in Italy.

And presently the children were to be taken into closer contact with war. For towards the end of 1810, or thereabouts, it occurred to King Joseph that appearances, the royal prestige, demanded the presence at his court of the families of his generals and high dignitaries. His government was crumbling under the hatred of the Spanish people. He wished by all means in his power to give it a look of stability and permanence. So General Hugo, now enrolled as a count or marquis among the nobles of Spain, and a governor of provinces, received a gentle hint that Madame Hugo might advantageously take up her residence in the Peninsula. She started for Madrid, with her three boys, in the ensuing spring.

As far as Bayonne nothing very noteworthy happened. The journey was a nine days' *diligence* drive and no more. But from Bayonne onwards adventures might be expected. At that point the travellers would enter a hostile country, all swarming with insurgent patriots and brigands. To proceed alone, and without an escort, would have been madness. Madame Hugo waited at Bayonne for about a month, and then attached herself to the military convoy which was to take to Madrid the periodical subsidy of the French Government. It was a notable procession. First came a small body of troops—cavalry, infantry, and artillery, with two cannon. In the midst

the waggons containing the "treasure." Then the antiquated, huge, travelling carriage of Madame Hugo, who, as the wife of a governor, had successfully contested precedence with a duchess of Spain. Then an interminable line—more than two miles long, we are told—of vehicles of every form and description—all green and gold for the most part, those being the Imperial colours—and creaking, groaning, jingling on their way, with much cracking of whips and swearing in every tongue, and an intolerable cloud of dust. On either side of the line were more soldiers, and, forming the rear-guard, more soldiers still, and a couple of cannon. Upwards of two thousand men : such was the force required to convoy money across Spain in the days when Joseph was king. Nor does it appear that there was a man too many. Scarcely a month previously another convoy had been robbed and massacred at Salinas.

No such evil chance befel the cavalcade of which the Hugos formed part. Does not the boat that conveys the fortunes of Cæsar at all times enjoy special immunities? Yet were adventures, and even perils, not altogether wanting. Near Salinas again there was an attack on the part of the Guerillas, but badly planned, and resulting only in some smart sharp-shooting—sharp-shooting, however, carried on at sufficiently close quarters to allow of a brace of bullets being lodged in the family coach. A little farther on the road, that same coach as nearly as possible fell over into a precipice, and was only saved, with its occupants, by the prompt arms and hands of a company of Dutch soldiers, whose good-will Madame Hugo had secured by benevolences of food. Further on

an axle-tree broke, and the little party were almost left behind to the tender mercies of the Guerillas. Everywhere too there was evidence of the hatred of the inhabitants. The houses in which Madame Hugo and her children were quartered seemed deserted, and offered the most sinister hospitality to the travellers. All was done to make them feel that they were the guests of fear and harsh necessity.

Over the months of Victor's sojourn in Spain it is not my purpose to linger. He reached Madrid in June, 1811, and was shortly after placed, with his brother Eugène, in a great dreary aristocratic school kept by the monks. Here the lads were far from happy among schoolfellows of a hostile nation, and relatively much less advanced in learning. Winged words hurtled in the air pretty constantly, and blows followed, and, on one occasion at least, the use of Spanish steel. Often must the two younger brothers have cast envious glances—such glances as the caterpillar may be supposed to cast at the butterfly—when looking at Abel Hugo, now promoted to the dignity of page in the royal household, and gaily glittering in his uniform of blue, silver, and gold. But deliverance from this Spanish dungeon was at hand. The plot had begun to thicken in the Peninsula. The tide of conquest was turning. In January, 1812, Ciudad Rodrigo fell into Wellington's hands. Three months later he took the commanding position of Badajoz. In July came the victory of Salamanca. Events either accomplished or looming rendered Spain a quite unfit sojourn for French women and children at the beginning of that year. Their presence could scarcely act, even in

appearance, as a kind of flying buttress to the tottering French monarchy. Ere March had blustered itself into April, Madame Hugo and her two younger boys were on their way back to the garden of the Feuillantines. Abel remained behind to take his boy-soldier's part in the conclusion of a war disastrous to the French arms.

The disproportion between the ages of the boys and their advancement in learning rendered it difficult to place Eugène and Victor in a public school. M. Larivière was accordingly engaged to teach them their humanities. And as regards this worthy pedagogue, as indeed with regard to the whole tendency of the young Hugos' early education, there are several observations which ought to be made, and may fittingly here find a place. Victor Hugo's first works, as we shall presently see, were the outcome of very strong monarchical and legitimist convictions, and animated throughout by the spirit of Roman Catholic Christianity. His later works, the works of the last thirty years of his life, were, on the contrary, fiercely democratic and anti-clerical. Whereas he had in his youth execrated the Revolution, and blessed kings and priests, he came afterwards to speak of the Revolution in terms of rapture, and to regard kings and priests as the twin pests that afflict mankind. Of this change in his convictions he was very proud. He reverts to the subject again, and yet again, in verse and prose. If Murat, he asks, is to be praised and honoured because, "having been born a stable-boy, he became a king," should not that man be honoured more who has achieved the rare and difficult ascent from error to truth, and, having been "born an aristocrat and a royalist, has become a

democrat"? As to M. Larivière,—whom he calls, apparently for the purpose of intensifying his clerical and aristocratic character, the "Abbé de la Rivière,"—that poor, mild old gentleman's instructions are used by his pupil to point the most terrible moral. He stands forth as the type of the priest-teacher, "inoculating young intelligences with the old age of prejudice," "taking from childhood its dawn and substituting night," "making crooked that which nature has made straight," and, as a last "terrible *chef d'œuvre*," "manufacturing deformed souls like that of Torquemada, and producing unintelligent intelligences like that of Joseph de Maistre." "To this perilous teaching"—perilous indeed—"were subjected" Eugène and Victor Hugo. No wonder that the latter was proud of having come through such an ordeal, if not unscathed at the time, yet at least with powers of ultimate recuperation.

Now, as regards all this, it is quite clear that great allowance must again be made for the poetic temperament. Victor Hugo's ancestry was not, by any means, as aristocratic as he seems to have supposed. "Brutus" Hugo, the son of a carpenter, had been an ardent republican; was probably a republican still, though of a less advanced type, at the time of Moreau's conspiracy; seems never to have been a very enthusiastic imperialist, and was no more than a perfunctory royalist when Louis XVIII. again sat on the throne of France. In religion we are told that he was, "like most of the soldiers of the empire, an anti-clerical." Madame Hugo unquestionably *was* a royalist. Here indeed a sinister influence must be admitted. Her politics were, as seen from her son's ultimate standpoint,

very bad. But her religion? She had none. She was as freethinking a countrywoman of Voltaire as need be. When Eugène and Victor were at the school at Madrid, the fathers wanted them to serve the mass like the other pupils. She refused; and, when the fathers insisted, declared that her sons were Protestants. "She was," says her daughter-in-law, "in favour of an entire freedom of education, . . . and interfered no more with the intellects of her children than with their consciences," allowing them to read indiscriminately Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, and even the most unsavoury novels of the last century. Whatever may have been the faults of such a system of training, it can scarcely be accused of a tendency to superstition. While as to poor old M. Larivière, the priest who had abandoned his orders, and married his cook—with whom he lived in homeliest fashion,—surely the faith of the most orthodox agnostic would have had nothing to fear from *his* teaching. In truth, Victor Hugo loved antithesis over much. It filled his memory unduly with glooms and gleams. There was not that difference which he imagined between his later creed and the influences that had surrounded his childhood.[1]

In 1813, "municipal improvement" cast a covetous eye on the beautiful wilderness of the Feuillantines. New streets were to be built there; and Madame Hugo, on the last day of the year, moved to a house in the Rue Cherche-Midi, near to some old friends, the Fouchers,

[1] M. Lesclide, who has published a volume of Victor Hugo's Table Talk, says, "We all know what a thoroughly monarchical and Christian education he had received." This was evidently the impression which Victor Hugo's conversation left on those about him —probably the impression in his own mind.

whom we shall meet again in the course of our narrative. The new year, of which this 31st of December was the eve, proved to be an eventful one in the annals of the Hugo family, no less than in the annals of Europe. On the 9th of January, 1814, General Hugo, who had perforce left Spain after the defeat of the French arms at Vittoria in the preceding June, received orders to assume command at Thionville, on the Eastern frontier, and to defend the place against the approaching allies. In April Napoleon abdicated, and Louis XVIII. re-entered Paris, to the gratification of all good royalists,—Madame Hugo's enthusiasm flaring so high that it does not seem even to have been damped by the quartering upon her of a Prussian colonel and fifty Prussian soldiers. Shortly afterwards she went to Thionville, to "settle some important family matters" with her husband, as her daughter-in-law tells us. Speaking more particularly, she went, as would appear from M. Barbou's life of the poet, to arrange the terms of a separation by mutual consent. How had this come about? Was political incompatibility at the bottom of it, as M. Barbou would have us believe? I trow not. General Hugo's principles were scarcely of that inflexible character; and there are rumours of other reasons. Anyhow, General Hugo seems at about this time to have determined that his two younger sons should be sent to school,[1] and educated in

[1] According to M. Barbou, and others, it was after the second restoration of the Bourbons, in 1815, that General Hugo determined to send the boys to school. But this does not agree with Madame Hugo's narrative, and it is difficult to reconcile some of the incidents which she relates with the view that the boys were not at school before the second entry of the allies into Paris. The question, however, is of no particular importance.

view of the École Polytechnique, which is the recognized avenue in France to various kinds of government employment, and in particular to admission into the corps of military engineers.

To school the two boys went accordingly, to a certain Pension Cordier [1] et Decotte, where they speedily pushed themselves into a position of some prominence. The future king of men—for such Victor Hugo unquestionably became—began by being a king of boys. He and his brother led rival parties among their school companions, and exercised most despotic rule. That some of this ascendency was attributable to the fact that they occupied the aristocratic position of parlour-boarders, is possible. Native force of character and intellect must, however, have had something to do with it besides. For the rest, if we try to picture to ourselves what Victor was as a schoolboy, we shall, I think, have the image of a fine manly intelligent lad, fast developing into a fine manly young fellow. Though he was already rhyming apace, and to excellent effect, as we shall presently see, yet had he none of the poetic sensitiveness that shrinks and shivers at the rude contact of school life. He was no Shelley to make himself prematurely miserable over the want of harmony in his little world. Rather did he drink delight of battle with his peers, as occasion presented. He seems, too, to have studied zealously—reserving a large place in his thoughts, no doubt, for Chateaubriand, who was the idol of young France at that time—but still applying himself honestly and well to the

[1] Cordier, by the by, was another unfrocked priest, an intense admirer of Rousseau.

school curriculum, and following assiduously the courses of lectures at the Collége Louis le Grand. For mathematics especially he appears to have shown great aptitude; and, in the general annual competition of all French scholars for the University prizes of 1818, he obtained the fifth place for physics.

This was the last year of his school life. In August, 1818, being then sixteen years of age, he left the Pension Cordier et Decotte, fully determined for his own part that he would not try to obtain admission to the École Polytechnique, or be a soldier. He had, in fact, made up his mind to pursue a quite different career.

## CHAPTER II.

IN the lives of the great majority of men there is a clearly marked boundary line, a kind of natural frontier as it were, between the years of preparation and the years of performance. At a certain point education ends, and ends definitely. The man has gone through his school or college course, and then, his training being over and done with, he addresses himself to maturer tasks and duties. But in Victor Hugo's life there is no such break. Though, with the arbitrariness of the biographer, I have used the conclusion of his school course to mark the end of a chapter, yet in truth the severance of his connection with the Pension Cordier was by no means an epoch-making event in his career. Long before he left that establishment he had commenced what was to be his life work. Already had he earned a reputation as a poet, and shown his facility and aptitude as a writer. Deliverance from lessons and lectures merely meant, in his case, greater freedom to pursue the avocations which he was already pursuing. In order, therefore, to take up his literary life from its commencement, it is necessary to go some little way back.

Verse, verse, and yet again verse—such had been the

boy's delight almost from the time when he first went to school. Genius was his unquestionably. Boon nature had given him that priceless gift without stint or measure. And the circumstances of his childhood had been such as to develop and foster the gift, and favour its early manifestation. We have seen what a panorama of moving sights had already passed before his eyes—Italy in her beauty, Spain in her picturesqueness, war in its grandeur and pomp, its misery and haggard horror. Young as he was, he had seen many men and cities. He must have known, boyishly no doubt, but still very really, the poignant emotions of France as news came to her, however fitfully, of defeat in Spain, of the melting away of the Grand Army into the snows of Russia, and of the culminating disaster of Waterloo. All this had found a place in his mind, had vivified thought and feeling, and given him something whereof to sing. So he piped his boyish songs without cessation. "During the three years which he spent at the Pension Decotte," says Madame Hugo, "he wrote verses of every possible kind: odes, satires, epistles, poems, tragedies, elegies, idyls, imitations of Ossian, translations of Virgil, of Lucan, of Ausonius, of Martial; songs, fables, tales, epigrams, madrigals, logogriphs, acrostics, charades, rebuses, impromptus. He even wrote a comic opera." It was Théophile Gautier, if I remember right, who declared that a poet ought to exercise his prentice hand on at least fifty thousand lines of verse before writing anything for publication. Victor Hugo must have fulfilled this hard saying almost to the the letter.

And soon his verse was to receive public recognition.

The French Academy, that august body, had proposed as the subject for the prize of French poetry, to be awarded in 1817, "The happiness that study can procure in every situation of life." Scarcely a very fit theme on which to poetise, as we should now consider. What composer was it, Grétry or Méhul, who gave it as his opinion that the words of a song or opera mattered not at all, and that there would be no difficulty in setting to music *The Gazette of Holland?* And similarly it would almost seem as if the Academicians of the commencement of this century held that any proposition, however prosaic, could be "set" to verse. "Happiness procured by study in every situation of life"—what dreary didacticism do the words suggest! Nevertheless, young Victor applied himself to the task bravely. With the readiness of pen which he already possessed, to write the requisite number of lines, even on such an untoward subject, was comparatively easy. But how should he get the poem, when written, to the Academy? Schoolmaster Decotte was his rival as a poet, and not at all likely to help him. Fortunately a friendly usher, in whom he had confided, turned the difficulty by a clever ruse—took the boys for a walk in the direction of the Institute, set them looking at the fountains before that abode of learning, and, while they were thus employed, scampered off with Victor, and deposited the precious manuscript in the secretary's office. With what anxiety the result was expected need not here be told. Is there one of us who has not gone through similar experiences? The Academy delivered judgment on the 25th of August, 1817, divided the prize between a

M. Lebrun and Saintine,—afterwards well known as the writer of "Picciola," the story of the prison flower,—and then gave an honourable mention, ninth in order, to Victor Hugo's lines. The boy had taken occasion in the poem to refer to his age, and this, contrary to the accepted tradition, seems to have stood him in good stead with the venerable Academicians.

An honourable mention from the Academy, even with no higher place than the ninth, was a title to distinction for a lad of fifteen. Victor, who a year before, on the 10th of July, 1816, had written in one of his copy books, "I will be Chateaubriand or nothing," must have felt that he had placed his foot on the first rung of the ladder of fame. Complimentary verse flowed in upon him. His erewhile rival, M. Decotte, abandoned the poetical field, beaten. The boy became a boy of mark in his little world, and was not even quite unknown, as a sort of poetic prodigy, in the great world outside the school precincts.[1] So there was much more versifying as may be supposed, and a considerable amount of prose writing too.

Abel, the eldest of the three brothers, had abandoned the military profession after the fall of Joseph Bonaparte, and was apparently devoting himself to business of some sort, and living the pleasant life of young bachelorhood in Paris. Among his numerous friends were several who had a turn for letters. He himself possessed strong literary tastes, and was soon to devote himself entirely to

[1] M. Barbou seems to assign to this date the famous epithet of "sublime child," which Chateaubriand, or somebody else, did, or did not, apply to Victor Hugo. Madame Hugo assigns to it a later date. The whole matter, much discussed as it has been, seems scarcely worth discussion.

literature, and become a voluminous writer and compiler. With all these author-aspirants Eugène and Victor were on the best of terms. As schoolboys they must have been under comparative restraint; but still they were able to join with their elders in periodical cheap dinners, at which the readings and recitations, though doubtless immature, were doubtless also better than the fare. So no wonder if the École Polytechnique, and the military engineering beyond it, receded gradually into the background. To besiege and carry Parnassus, if I may use a well-worn image which would have occurred quite naturally to any writer of the time—to besiege and carry that high embattled hill of Poesy, soon seemed to young Victor the only strategic operation worth pursuing.

This was not a view calculated to commend itself to a military father. General Hugo probably thought that literature and loafing were synonymous terms; does not seem to have been mollified by the fact that Victor had inscribed his name as a law student; and, in fine, adopted the particularly stern form of parental argument which consists in cutting off the supplies. Accordingly, when the two boys left school in the August of 1818, they went to live with their mother, and, as would appear, at her charges. *She* had no objection to literature as a profession, and possibly knew of no particular reason why her estranged husband should enjoy the luxury of having his own way. Perhaps, with the prescience of love and motherhood, she even foresaw that, in the case of one of her sons at least, letters would prove to be the path of glory.

On the 3rd of May, 1818, Eugène had obtained a

marigold as a prize for an ode sent to the competition of the "Floral Games" of Toulouse. Victor, not to be behindhand, sent three odes to the competition of 1819. For one of these he obtained an honourable mention only; but the other two were more successful, and won respectively a golden lily and a golden amaranth. Prize poems are but questionable products of human industry at the best. These two, however, certainly possessed exceptional merit, and, as the work of a boy of seventeen, are very remarkable. One was on the Virgins of Verdun, who, preferring death to dishonour, had been infamously put to death, by the revolutionary tribunal, for giving money and help to some emigrant nobles; the other was on the re-erection of the statue of Henry IV., overthrown during the Revolution, and now, in these happier Restoration days, replaced on its pedestal with a burst of popular enthusiasm. Both poems were republished three years afterwards, in June, 1822, in the volume of "Odes," and form part of the collected works. Nor need I say more of them here. Neither must I linger, as I am tempted to do, over the performances of the next year or so, the further competitions at Toulouse and the Academy, the poems, political or satirical, which the boy published or wrote. But, hurrying as I am, I cannot forbear to stop one moment to catch a glimpse of young Victor through the eyes of an older poet, Soumet, who, coming from Toulouse at the beginning of 1820, thus described him to a friend: "This child has a very remarkable head, really a study for Lavater. I asked him what he intended to be, and if he purposed devoting himself entirely to literature. He answered that he hoped

one day to become a peer of France, . . . and he will succeed."

So we catch sight of him in the first dawn-flush of his fame and young ambition, a noticeable lad who means ere his day of life has worn to evening to win a victor's palm. Meanwhile he and his brother Abel have started a paper. It is to be published twice a month, and the first number has appeared in December, 1819. The title is the *Conservateur Littéraire*, or *Literary Conservative*—a title that rather raises a smile as one thinks how very soon the younger of the two editors is to become the most ardent of innovaters in matters literary, and how ultimately he will become the fiercest of Radicals in matters political. As to the causes that have led to the establishment of the periodical—these are not far to seek. Madame Hugo and her sons were anything but rich. Some effort at remunerative work had evidently to be made. According to a friendly article in the political *Conservateur*, Chateaubriand's paper, the literary *Conservateur* was started by the young Hugos with the pious object of repaying to their mother the debt of gratitude which they owed for their education. They wished to add to the graces of her life. "Happy youths," said the article, "to have had a mother who has appreciated the value of education! Happy mother, to see her efforts on their behalf so crowned"!

Into the work of writing for the *Conservateur Littéraire*, Victor entered with characteristic industry. The duties of editor he appears to have shared with his brother Abel; and there were several other writers, of whom, so far as I know the names, one only, Alfred de Vigny,

can be said to have made a permanent mark in literature. But the most prolific contributor, without any comparison at all, was Victor himself. Poetry, history, politics, the story of Bug Jargal in its earliest form, literary criticism in profusion, art criticism, dramatic criticism, the boy flamed out his thoughts with the lavish prodigality of a young prince. The periodical lasted from December, 1819, to March, 1821, and forms three volumes. Of these he is said to have written at least two.[1] Later, in 1834, when he began to feel the necessity of giving some account of the changes in his opinions, he made a selection from his earlier writings of this period, and published it as a "Journal of the ideas, opinions, and studies of a young Jacobite in 1819."[2] But this selection, which is made without any direct reference to the *Conservateur*, is fragmentary only. The exhibited specimens give but a faint idea of the wealth of the mine from which they are drawn. This however is to be noted: young as he was, and I shall have to make the same remark presently in speaking of his earlier verse, he had already acquired a singular mastery over his pen. If his style did not yet possess the individuality, the brilliant colour and music which it acquired ten years afterwards,—if, in a word, it was still a classical and not a romantic style,—yet it was a very good style of its kind. As Carlyle in his first essays was to show that the writer of "Sartor Resartus" might, if so minded, have written his mother tongue excellently in the ordinary way; as Turner in his earlier draw-

[1] So Mr. Biré says. The *Conservateur Littéraire* is now a bibliographical rarity, a black swan among books.

[2] It forms part of the "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées."

ings was to demonstrate that the most imaginative and splendid of colourists had in him the stuff of a minute and patient draughtsman—so, in these prentice papers, did Victor Hugo prove how well he could have walked in the old paths of literature, and that it was not because these were closed to him that he boldly hewed out for himself paths new and untrod.

But the days of innovation were not yet. The *Conservateur Littéraire* was conservative in reality as well as title. The great poetical event of the year 1819, an event marking a very important date in the history of French poetry, was the publication of the posthumous poems of André Chénier. Victor Hugo, reviewing the volume, speaks, as a matter of course, of the writer's royalism, of his martyrdom on the revolutionary scaffold, and pays a tribute too, it must be admitted, to the power of the verse. But then what reserve in the praise, what almost admissions that Chénier's "style is incorrect and sometimes barbarous," his "ideas vague and incoherent," his "imagination effervescent," his "sentences mutilated," his "familiarity" with the "language" "wanting." And, while treating Chénier thus half-heartedly—Chénier, who was the real herald of the romantic movement in French poetry,—the young reviewer has words of gracious recognition for the Abbé Delille, the almost last withered twig upon the classic tree. He speaks of the "elegance and harmony of Delille's style," and praises his "pretty poem" on the "Departure from Eden,"—praising Delille especially for "having changed into a tender commiseration the savage anger which Adam, in Milton's work, had testified against Eve," and for having proved, "by

this happy inspiration," "how well he knew the delicacies of the French Muse." Victor Hugo praising Delille at the expense of Milton, this is indeed a Saul among the classic prophets. But it is as nothing to his praising Corneille and Racine at the expense of Shakespeare.

"We have never understood," says he, "the distinction which people seek to establish between the classic style and the romantic style. The plays of Shakespeare and Schiller only differ from the plays of Corneille and Racine in that they are more faulty. That is the reason why, in the former, recourse must be had to greater scenic pomp. French tragedy despises such accessories because it goes straight to the heart, and the heart hates whatever disturbs its interest."

We are very far here from the spirit which was soon to animate the young romantic school, and to induce Petrus Borel to declare that if he could have met the deceased Racine in a theatre of to-day, he would have horsewhipped him before the public!

As regards the poetry which Victor wrote at this time, and published in June, 1822, under the title "Odes et Poésies Diverses," the same criticism holds good. It is emphatically classical, not romantic poetry. There are the stock classical apostrophes, to "unhappy Vendée;" to the "light spectres," which had been in life the virgins of Verdun; to the dead Duke of Berry, assassinated in 1820; to the new-born Duke of Bordeaux; to the river Jordan, which had supplied water for that young prince's baptism; to the "peoples" who had wrongly made a hero of "Buonaparte," the "formidable inheritor of the spirit of Nimrod." There is here and there also an "O thou!" which sounds distinctly like an echo from the emphatic

eighteenth century. And a rhetorical periphrasis too often takes the place of an immediate direct word. Nor are those final notes of exclamation wanting which, according to Coleridge's splenetic remark, seemed to be used by French poets as a kind of hieroglyphics to draw attention to their own cleverness. All these objections are fairly chargeable against the odes; and there is in them besides only too much of that which has so often been the bane of French poetry, eloquence. We English escape that danger with greater ease, for in our mother tongue the distinction between the language of public speech and the language of verse is sharp and clear. Whole classes of words cannot be used indifferently in either. But French is a more homogeneous tongue, and though there is in it a real distinction of a similar kind, that distinction is far less obviously marked. And here, moreover, the young poet's very subjects, and the spirit in which he addressed himself to them, were such as to tempt him into eloquent prose.

"There are," said he, in his original preface, "two intentions in the publication of this work, a political intention, and a literary intention; but in the author's thought the first of these is a consequence of the latter, for the history of men affords no material for poetry, unless that history be regarded in the light of monarchical ideas and religious faith."

Here we seem well in the regions of rhetoric.

But if the odes are formed on older models, and have the faults of an obsolete school, they are excellent samples of the achievements of that school. They possess lithe force and fervour, an eloquence most real if misplaced, a power of compelling language into metre without re-

course to the obvious inversions which French verse,—and English verse also for that matter,—tolerated all too long. "Madre del oro" was the name given by Sir Walter Raleigh to I know not what wonderful yellow metal, supposed in nature's alchemy to be the generator of the gold he went forth to seek. "Madre del oro!"—if we have not in these first verses of Victor Hugo the fine gold of a renovated French poetry, we have, at least, the matrix from which it would emerge.

## CHAPTER III.

THE first collection of the "Odes" was published in June, 1822; and though the book produced much less sensation than had been produced two years before by Lamartine's "Méditations," yet it clearly "numbered good intellects." But that highest pleasure which a first great success can bring was denied to the young poet: his mother had died on the 27th of June, 1821.

Of her a word may fittingly here be said. She was evidently a woman of strong character, trained in habits of independent action by her husband's long absences. Thus she had been led to assume towards her sons, and especially towards the two younger, a position of double parentage. Loving them with a mother's love and entire devotion, she at the same time ruled them with a father's firm hand. Of Victor's capacity she entertained, and with more than abundant cause, a very exalted opinion. "She looked forward," M. Asseline says, "with the greatest confidence to the future of her son, holding that he might, with even greater justice than Fouquet," Louis XIV.'s overweening "*Surintendant*, adopt as his device the words *quo non ascendam?* 'to what may I not rise?'"

That to such a mother Victor should, on his side, have been greatly devoted, was but natural. That her death would leave a terrible blank in his life was clear. It must also have made a considerable difference in his circumstances. The father married again, and under somewhat peculiar conditions, on the 20th of July, 1821, within a month of his first wife's demise. *He* seems to have given his son at this time neither material nor moral support. So the youth of nineteen, left to his own devices, went very sadly on his own way; lived as he could, "and thereto soberly," as Chaucer has it—lived, in fact, as he afterwards represented Marius to have lived in the "Misérables," on almost nothing;—worked very hard; and, being out of sorts and quarrelsome, fought a duel with a soldier, who ran him through the arm. "Here am I alone," he wrote to a friend on the 14th of August, "and I have a whole long life to live through, unless" . . . .

"Unless!"—what does the word point to? Suicide, or the possibility of some presence that would make life no longer a solitude? Scarcely the former; for here Love takes in hand the web of Victor Hugo's story, and weaves it with threads of purest gold and silk of daintiest dye; and the fabric so woven is, as I think, altogether beautiful.

But, to tell this love-tale aright, I must go a good way back—go back indeed to a time anterior to Victor's birth,—to the days when his father was doing War Office work in Paris.

For among Major Hugo's civilian colleagues at the War Office was a certain Pierre Foucher, a man of culture and ability, with whom the Major entertained very

amicable relations. Both were married at about the same time ; and Major Hugo, acting as best man to his friend, lifted up his glass at the wedding dinner, and gave utterance to this wish, "May you have a daughter, and I a son, and we will arrange a marriage between them. I drink to their joint health and prosperity." A prophetic toast truly. Major Hugo did have a son : he had three ; and M. Foucher had a daughter, Adèle, of whom we have already caught a glimpse in the garden of the Feuillantines—a little trotting creature, just made to be tossed in a swing, or laughingly charioted in a wheelbarrow. Later, in 1814, we catch a glimpse of her again, going arm in arm with Victor, for the two families had remained on the friendliest terms, to see some royal procession of the restored Bourbons. Later yet, in the winter of 1819–20, we see a small party of friends, almost a family party, meeting night after night at M. Foucher's private apartments in the War Office. He is there, of course, and his wife and son—and Miss Adèle too, we may be sure ; and with them are Madame Hugo and her two sons. It is the quietest of quiet parties, for M. Foucher is somewhat of an invalid, and save when he and Madame Hugo take a pinch of snuff together, little is said. But there are other pleasures than those of speech ; and as Victor sits in the half-light watching that dark handsome girl at her needle, he thinks that never did hours pass so happily. Indeed when winter comes again, he shows his pleasure in a manner at once imprudent and obvious. Madame Hugo reads his love glances. M. Foucher observes that "Miss Adèle" sees them too—the expression is her own —"without displeasure." Parents are so unreasonable !

Victor is penniless. Miss Foucher has nothing. Both are too young to think of marriage. Tears and separation—what other issue is possible?

But not thus was Victor Hugo to be baffled and beaten; not thus was his first love to pass out of his life and heart. Sighs and the languors of passion, day dreams and the enchanted reveries of youthful hope, all to which the poetic temperament turns so naturally for comfort, he thrust resolutely to one side. With the tenacity and strength of will that characterized him through life, he set himself to overcome every obstacle. If industry and strenuous effort could make the marriage possible, Adèle Foucher should be his wife. In simple truth, and with no embellishment of rhetoric or imagination, did he vow to himself, in Lord Tennyson's words,

> "To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
> And worship her by years of noble deeds
> Until he won her."

Of course there were occasional meetings. After Madame Hugo's death the two lovers seem to have come together for one sad interview. Then there is a little confusion of dates. But in July, 1822, as I gather, the opposition of the Fouchers was finally overcome. They had gone to Dreux, taking their daughter with them. Victor followed, as the sunflower turns towards the sun. M. Foucher says: "While I thought him quietly in Paris, the young poet had followed us on foot to Dreux, where we had gone to spend a few days. We discovered him roaming round the house, and I was compelled to come to some understanding with him.

At our interview he displayed an unalterable resolve." What was to be done in the face of such perseverance? Everything pleaded for the lovers—Adèle's tears and Victor's energy and confidence in the future. "For ourselves," says M. Foucher again, "that to which we attached special importance was the uprightness of his character, and the innocence of his tastes." So they were engaged, and the "moments" doubtless "ran themselves in golden sands" at Dreux, and afterwards in Paris when the lovers returned thither. Prudence, of course, still counselled delay. But the first edition of the "Odes" realized a profit of 700 francs. In September Louis XVIII., most opportunely, gave the poet a pension of 1,000 francs from his privy purse.[1] Then the young couple were to be spared the expense of house-keeping, for they were to live with the Fouchers. And was not Victor full of work, and already nearly famous? In brief, the marriage took place on the 12th of October, 1822.

Does this love-tale, so beautiful in its beginning—beautiful with strong tender passion, and energy, and high resolve—does it continue beautiful to the end? There is, to quote Lord Tennyson again, a fierce light that beats against a throne; and of both Victor Hugo and Madame Hugo it may be said that they sat enthroned among their fellow men, and that the fierce light did not spare them. When I think of the episodes of this courtship and marriage, of the glow, as of early summer, which this time reflected upon the poet's

[1] He had already sent Victor Hugo 500 francs some months before for the ode on the assassination of the Duc de Berry.

verse, I confess that there also comes back to my mind an autumn picture—"autumn in everything," as Mr. Browning sings—that has been sketched for us by M. Asseline, Madame Hugo's cousin.

We are at Guernsey, at Hauteville House, during the days of the poet's exile. Some forty-three years or so have passed since his marriage. Madame Hugo—but why not tell the tale in M. Asseline's own words, which are wanting neither in skill nor pathos?

"There are," he says, "certain hours of life that sorrow marks for her own. I went one autumn day into Madame Victor Hugo's drawing-room at Hauteville, and found her alone, sunk in sad thoughts, and lying back seemingly exhausted. Her eyes had already grown very weak, and she could not see how painfully I was impressed at finding her so poorly. 'You are not to dine with me to-day,' she said. 'And why?' 'Our gentlemen have organized a little merry-making at Madame Drouet's, and they are expecting you.' 'But I prefer to dine with you; I shall certainly not leave you alone.' 'No, I shall dine with my sister; and really I should take it ill if you stayed. I insist on your going to Madame Drouet's. It will please my husband. There are few opportunities of pleasure-making here. I repeat that you are expected. Go, you will laugh, and the time will pass gaily.' I looked at my cousin as she sat in the shadow of the great curtains with their heavy folds. Her forehead was of marble, her lips without colour, her eyes almost lifeless. Then I drew my armchair nearer to hers, and we lost ourselves in endless talk. . . . The day was waning. We exchanged no thoughts that were not of sadness. 'Go, go,' she said at last; 'you would only make me cry!' I took a few steps towards the door. She called me back: 'You will write down for me that fine passage of verse you were quoting a moment ago:—

"'Time, the old god, invests all things with honour,
And makes them white.'

And now be quick and join your cousins; don't keep them waiting.'"

One can almost see her as she sits there in the

gloaming of her life, thronged by shadows from the past. And who was the Madame Drouet to whose house her husband and sons had gone for merriment? She was an actress, and long years before had won the poet's good-will by taking the somewhat inferior part of the Princess Negroni in his play of "Lucrèce Borgia;" and she had too figured as Lady Jane Grey in "Marie Tudor." She had also been, if we may believe his assertion, the most beautiful woman of this century; but then the statement seems to have been made in her presence, which would excuse a little flattery, and Victor Hugo, moreover, never stood in sufficient awe of a superlative. The very fairest among the many million daughters of Eve born into this world of ours between the years 1800 and 1875, or thereabouts! That were indeed a proud position. One rather ventures to doubt whether Madame Drouet, even in the noon of her beauty, can have been quite so beautiful as *that*. Superlatives apart, however, there can be no question of her real graces of face and form. Are we not told that the record of them remains, modelled into Pradier's colossal statue of the town of Lille, on the Place de la Concorde, at Paris?

This lady had helped Victor Hugo to escape from Paris in the bad days of December, 1851, after the *Coup d'État*. She had followed him to Brussels and Guernsey. She was, I am quoting M. Asseline again, "the veiled witness of his labours," "the discreet confidant of his genius," his "muse," his "very soul," his "Beatrice." Much of his verse was inspired by her. During later years she was his constant daily companion. Nor, especially as seen

in the beautiful still starlight of age, can she be regarded as aught save a gracious and dignified figure. There was something queenly, we are told, in her crown of silver hair, with its sheen of palest gold. "I do not think," says M. Asseline, "that any one ever possessed more tact. In a delicate position she evinced a perfect dignity, and an irreproachable delicacy of conduct. Her tenderness" for Victor Hugo "had with years melted into veneration. A kind of august effluence seemed to pass from one to the other."

Dante's wife, who bore his children, and finds no place in his verse—I have often wondered what she thought of Beatrice. And Beatrice was, after all, but an ideal, and as a vision of one dead and seen in glory. Madame Drouet was no vision. She was a woman of very real flesh and blood, whose influence on the poet was persistent and diurnal. Such a Beatrice might well be among the shadows that collected round Madame Hugo as she sat all alone that autumn evening in the gloom of the old oak and tapestry of Hauteville House.

But, after all, I have no wish to exaggerate, or weigh upon this matter unduly. There are many shadows that will haunt age and ill-health, even when there is no Madame Drouet in the case; and to endeavour to find the truth in the obscure heart-relations of two human beings is mostly groping and guess work. Through what vicissitudes of love the poet and his wife had passed, who shall tell? "L'Homme qui rit" is the latest but one of his novels, and in it there is a passage which would seem to have been suggested rather by his feeling for her than for his silver-haired Beatrice:

"The heart," he says, "grows saturated with love, as with some divine salt which keeps it from decay. Hence the incorruptible adherence of those who have loved one another from the dawn of life, and the freshness of an old love that is prolonged. There exists an embalmment of love. It is of Daphnis and Chloe that are made Philemon and Baucis. In such cases old age is like youth, as evening is like morning."

As to Madame Hugo, within a year of her death, in 1868, and almost blind, she writes: "My husband is leaving Brussels the day after to-morrow. He is young, and of exceptional strength; he is happy and covered with glory, which is my greatest joy."

And so, by a natural transition, we go back to the year 1822, when life and love were in their morning glow together, and the young poet was looking forward gaily, confidently, to his new life and its responsibilities. Money was of the scarcest; work was a necessity; and from work Victor Hugo never shrank. Within a couple of months of his marriage he had written two more odes—one, of considerable beauty, on Louis XVII., the poor little captive king. A second edition of the odes appeared before the end of the year. And moreover he was busy with a novel begun in May, 1821, set aside for a time after his mother's death, and to be soon published anonymously in February, 1823.

This novel is "Han d'Islande," and may not unfairly be described as a very juvenile work, which would long since have faded into the night of oblivion if it were not for the reflected light of "Nôtre Dame de Paris" and the "Misérables." Victor Hugo himself, writing in 1833, calls it the production "of a young man, of a very young man;" says that it was written "during an attack of

fever;" declares that only the love passages have any basis of reality; and concludes that if it "be worth classing at all, it can only be classed as a fantastic novel." After so frank an admission, the critic is, of course, half disarmed. He can do no more than put the arrows of his satire back into the quiver. So I shall not dwell unduly on the character and habits of Han, the hero, though these can scarcely be accepted quite seriously. For Han is a kind of "man-beast of boundless savagery," who, living his baleful life in the Norway of 1699, indulges cannibalistic propensities, tears his human prey with long claw-like nails, and assuages his grief for the death of his son by cutting that young man's skull in two, and using the upper half as a drinking cup. An eccentric way of showing honour to the deceased, no doubt, but not more eccentric than the beverages quaffed out of this amazing vessel. Han's "particular vanities," as Mr. Stiggins would have said—and by the by he resembled that worthy in the character of his gloves, which were very large and worn constantly, so as to hide his talons,—his particular vanities were the "blood of men and the waters of the seas." Pah! how nauseous and improbable! Of human blood I say nothing, and for sufficient reasons; but sea water! Even when put into the plural, and set before an ogre, I defy him to drink it out of anything but bravado. Canning, speaking in the dark ages of gastronomy, declared that if any one said he preferred dry champagne to sweet, he told a lie. I am bold to make the same assertion with regard to Han, if he alleged any real liking for his "waters of the seas."

It will be gathered from the above that "Han d'Islande"

is a book in which the horrible plays a considerable part. And this is so. With such a protagonist as Han, murder and bloodshed are not likely to be wanting. Part of the scene is laid in the dead-house at Drontheim; and the keeper of the dead-house, a fantastic pedant of the name of Spiagudry, is a not unimportant actor in the story. Among the other *dramatis personæ* are an old noble, Schumacher, kept in prison by the intrigues of his enemies; his sweet and lovely daughter Ethel; and the son of one of Schumacher's chief enemies, a young officer, called Ordener, who, for love of Ethel, dares Han in his lair, to get possession of a casket containing the proofs of Schumacher's innocence. Among the incidents are a revolt of miners, and a terrible massacre of soldiers, after which "certain poor goatherds" see "in the gloaming" a "beast with a human face, drinking blood, and sitting upon heaps of the slain." There is finally a good deal of "business" of one kind and another. Han delivers himself up to justice for no very obvious reason, and sets fire to his prison and the contiguous barracks, perishing in the conflagration. Schumacher's enemies receive the reward of their misdeeds. He is released and reinstated in royal favour; and Ordener and Ethel are married and live happy ever after.

A book of an obsolete type, of a type which seems to have been popular at the beginning of this century, when Maturin and "Monk" Lewis were writers of renown, but now altogether of the past. Think what inextinguishable laughter would play like sheet lightning round such a book if published in this year of grace

1888. And yet it may be safely affirmed that of the novels published in 1888, not one in a hundred will be equally well written, or show such in-born power of clear and effective narration. Smile as we may at Han and his blood and bones, the man who at twenty could write this book had a great future before him.

"Han d'Islande" was criticised pretty freely, especially by the liberal journalists; but it won the favour of Charles Nodier, himself a novelist of no mean renown, a critic, a bibliophile, and also incidentally a graceful poet. He, a much older man than Victor Hugo, took the latter into his affectionate regard, and introduced him to his own wide circle of friends. Nor was this the only piece of good fortune that the book brought with it. The publication took place in the first part of February, 1823, and before the month had run its course, the king increased the poet's pension by 2,000 francs, and thus enabled him, in the following month, to leave M. Foucher's hospitable dwelling, and set up housekeeping for himself. But joy and sorrow,—such are the alternations of human life. As the rapture of the young couple's marriage-day had been broken in upon by the suddenly-declared insanity of Victor's brother Eugène, so now did a sad bereavement come to mar the happiness of the first months of their wedded life. A son was born to them in August, and in October the baby died.

That the poet worked hard at this time was almost a matter of course. In this very year 1823 he seems to have written upwards of twenty odes. In May, 1823, after some squabble with his publishers, he brought out a second edition of "Han d'Islande." In July there

appeared the first number of a periodical, the *Muse Française*, that lasted just a year, and to which he contributed two odes and five prose articles. These last were afterwards reproduced, but with certain alterations, in the "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées." They include a not very remarkable paper on Byron, then just deceased, and one, of greater importance, on "Quentin Durward." The latter has a special interest as showing what was the ideal of a novel formed, even at this early date, by the future author of "Nôtre Dame de Paris" and the "Misérables." "The novel as written by Walter Scott," he says, "is picturesque but prosaic. There is another novel that remains to be created, a novel more beautiful, to our thinking, and more complete. That novel will be at once a drama and an epic, it will be picturesque but poetical, real and also ideal, true and at the same time great. It will graft Walter Scott into Homer." Sir Walter prosaic—that may well seem a hard saying. Nor can one quite avoid a smile at reading, among the suppressed passages of the article, a paragraph in which the loyal and patriotic Victor falls foul of "that Scotchman" for selecting Louis XI. from among the roll of French kings as one of the characters of his novel. "None but a foreigner," he says, indignantly, "would have thought of such a thing. Well may we recognize in this an inspiration of the English muse!" Little can the poet have foreseen, when he shot this shaft at perfidious Albion, what a part the same Louis XI. would play in his own novel of "Nôtre Dame." [1]

[1] The preface to the "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées" implies, not quite ingenuously, that the various papers had been reprinted without alteration.

A second volume of odes, under the title of "Nouvelles Odes," appeared in March, 1824. The preface is an important document, as showing how little, even yet, the poet was prepared to step forward as the leader of the Romantic movement. He declares that, "for his part, he is profoundly ignorant of what the *Romantic* style and the *Classic* style may happen to be;" deplores the division of contemporary literature into two hostile camps; is anxious to be a messenger of peace between the contending parties; is anxious, above all, to guard against all "suspicion of heresy in the quarrel"; is full of "respect" for the "great name of Boileau," who, as he says, "shares with our Racine the great honour of having fixed the French language, a fact which in itself would suffice to prove that he too had a creative genius." And in a long letter to the *Journal des Débats*, dated the 26th of July, 1824, he takes up the same points, and is at great pains to prove that he had in no way innovated in his use of language, and that writers recognized as classic had employed expressions and images analogous to those for which he had been censured.

The preface moreover contains one or two eloquent passages of what may be described as "throne and altar" literature; and the same spirit breathes in the odes themselves. But for detailed analysis I have unfortunately no space. What has been said of the first volume of the odes must do duty for criticism on the second. Both deal with the same class of subjects, and in much the same way. That treating so often of the matter of politics, the verse has a tendency to eloquence rather than poetry, is true. Yet can one not help admiring

the virility of the themes selected. There was something of manhood in a lyre that vibrated so readily to any large national interest or feeling. And as the poet went on striking the strings, he decidedly acquired greater skill as a musician. The poetic quality of the verse in the second volume is better than in the first.

Louis XVIII. was a gentleman of the old school, who loved his ease and his Horace, and possessed a full share of the old French courtly *esprit*. Though he certainly read the young poet's poems, it may be doubted whether their fervour was quite to his taste. But neither he nor his successor, Charles X., could afford to overlook a writer of such unmistakable power and so eminently "well-thinking." The most popular poet of the time was without doubt Béranger, whose songs, borne on the wings of music, were finding their way into every hamlet of France. And Béranger was not "well-thinking" at all. As he explained in some of the wittiest and most deftly turned of his ringing couplets, the king could not be counted among his friends. His verses, now half wrapt in oblivion, were then as pebbles from the brook, thrown by some master-slinger and whistling round the monarchy and the accepted faith. They were a distinct political power. All the more did it behove the Government to encourage writers who were good royalists and good Catholics. Accordingly, some very acceptable rewards in money had been bestowed on Victor Hugo by Louis XVIII. Charles X., who succeeded his brother on the 16th of September, 1824, added to these a coveted distinction. On the 29th of April, 1825, Victor Hugo, and his brother-poet and friend, Lamartine, were made knights of the

Legion of Honour. Madame Hugo tells how her husband and herself, and their infant daughter Léopoldine, born in the previous year, were just starting in the *diligence* for Blois, on a visit to General Hugo, when the letter announcing Victor's nomination was placed in his hands. A pleasant surprise for the father, when they reached their destination, as may be supposed. He detached the piece of red ribbon from his own buttonhole, and transferred the honourable badge to the coat of his son. As a further mark of royal favour, the poet received, while at Blois, an invitation to the king's coronation at Reims, on the 29th of May. He went. But the ode in which the event is commemorated is scarcely one of his happiest efforts.

This same year 1825 marks the point at which Victor Hugo's genius, which had hitherto been flowing on in a fairly smooth and even bed, suddenly takes the decisive leap in its rush towards Romanticism. So far he had not given in his adherence to the new school. He seemed unaccountably to be hesitating, temporising, hanging back. Henceforward there will be no doubt as to his position. In the poems written during this year, especially the ballads, there is a marked advance. In the preface to the third volumes of the odes published in the October of the following year, 1826, there is an entire difference of tone. As Madame Hugo says, he there "resolutely unfurls the standard of liberty in literature." In 1827 he was rallying to that standard the flower of the intellectual youth of France, and boldly standing forward as their acknowledged chief.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE nineteenth century dawns sooner, I think, in Germany than in either of the other two great intellectual countries of Europe. Possibly the admirers of the eighteenth century would account for this by saying that there is some slight haze, as of early morning, in the German genius, and that our own age is nebulous, and lacks definiteness and clear precision. I would rather suggest, as one of many explanations, that Germany had no great classic literature from which to emancipate herself. It was not till the eighteenth century had passed its meridian that she could boast of writers who, as artists in language, rank with the great poets and prose-men of England and France. Her literature, being young, was untrammelled by the past, and, like Chaucer's monk—

> "lette old thinges pace,
> And held after the newe world the trace."

Accepting this explanation for what it is worth, of the fact itself there can, I think, be no question. Take a piece of literary criticism by Dr. Johnson, or of art criticism by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and compare it with a piece of criticism by Lessing, and the great relative modernness

of the latter is at once apparent. It is the criticism of intuition and imagination as opposed to the old criticism of plain common sense. So too in poetry, Schiller, and even Olympian and semi-classic Goethe, were precursors.

Close after the Germans came our own great poets of the last decade of the eighteenth, and the beginning of this century. And here the task was in some ways harder. A strong current had to be stemmed, an effort towards emancipation to be made. Pope and even Dryden were still a living influence, when Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Shelley, Keats, and Byron undertook, each after his several kind, to renew the language of poetry, break up the mould in which verse had so long and so mechanically been cast, and give to words and rhythm their full music, and freedom, and varied charm. To shake off the trammels of an immediate past was the first work which these great poets had to do. But in doing it, what help did they not receive from a still earlier past? If their own practice and theories were called in question, could they not appeal to such precedent and authority as few Englishmen at least were likely to gainsay? What names had the "classic" school in English poetry to put beside the names of Shakespeare and Milton? Was there any classicist, however hide-bound, however full of reserves and doubts, who could boldly refuse to admit the greatness of Chaucer, and Spenser, and of the dramatists of the days of Elizabeth and James I.?

France stood in a different position from either Germany or England. Unlike Germany, she already possessed

a body of literature universally recognized as of supreme importance and high artistic merit. Unlike England, the body of literature which she possessed was, on the poetical side at least, almost wholly classical. No one certainly would desire to diminish in aught the lustre that lingers round the names of Villon, the poet-thief, and Charles d'Orléans, the poet-prince, or to deny the wit and vigour of Clément Marot, and the grace of Ronsard. But to put these names in juxtaposition with those of Shakespeare or Milton, were to court ridicule. None but an enthusiast would even put them beside the names of Racine and Corneille, of Molière and Lafontaine. Sainte-Beuve did not venture to do it even in the full ardour of his romantic time. The later men, in truth, were so great that they dwarfed and hid the earlier. The French Romantic movement had to fight its way against the opposition of Racine, and with no such pioneer as Shakespeare.

And so it came tardily. Victor Hugo did not decisively and openly take up the standard till 1826; and in 1826, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott had long executed their best work, and Keats, Shelley, and Byron were dead.

Yes, the movement came tardily; and, did space allow, there would be an interest in marking its course. Chateaubriand helped it forward unquestionably by his eloquent insistence on the picturesque beauty of the Christian faith as seen in history, and by his largely-executed pictures of nature. Madame de Staël helped it too by giving to the French mind a glimpse, and more than a glimpse, of Germany. England assisted likewise,

through the influence of Byron, whose fame, unlike that of his poet contemporaries, overleapt the narrow seas, and became European,—and also through the influence of Scott. In 1819 came the publication of the fragments left by André Chénier, who had been done to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal but a day or two before the fall of Robespierre in 1793. Poor André Chénier!—legend, which in its way is often truer than history, speaks of him as striking his forehead just before the fall of the fatal axe, and exclaiming, "There was something *there!*" Yes, there was something there, no doubt, something no less important than a renovation of the poetics of France. Half a Greek in blood, more than half a Greek in spirit, with a knowledge of Greek and Roman antiquity to which Keats made no pretension, and a command over language—a verbal brush-power, if I may use the expression—scarcely inferior to Keats' own—he was distinctly the greatest force that had appeared in French poetry since the setting of the *Grand Siècle* of Louis XIV.

Chénier's poems were first published in 1819. In 1820 appeared Lamartine's "Méditations," and the Romantic movement though not in an aggressive way, was definitely started. The latter book at once took the world by storm. There was something of novelty and delight in verse of such exceeding harmony. It seemed to flow like a wide and beautiful river, large and limpid, and mirroring of preference in its waters the far heavens above—and reflecting the banks too, but these last somewhat less definitely, and with no strong precision of outline. At the same time there was a young officer in the

royal guard, Alfred de Vigny by name, who was writing what the world will not willingly let die. He wrote little, whether then or afterwards. The poems which he published during his life, though he lived long, fill a slender volume only; and an equally slender volume, "Les Destinées," appeared after his death. But among the earlier poems are "Eloa," the story of the angel born of one of Christ's tears, and "Madame de Soubise" a story of St. Bartholomew, and "Dolorida," and "La Frégate la Sérieuse"; and pervading the later verse there is a sombre stoicism of singular individuality and power. Judging by quality, as a poet should be judged, Alfred de Vigny keeps the pride of place which he won for himself in the years following 1820.

Victor Hugo, as we have seen, had hesitated somewhat before openly giving his adherence to the movement. When he did do so, he leaped almost at once into the position of its acknowledged chief. Of the men who might, perhaps, have contested his chieftaincy, Lamartine, though equally copious, never had his fire and overmastering energy, and De Vigny wrote little, wrote fastidiously, and was in no sense a leader of men. The third volume of the odes (together with certain ballads) appeared in October, 1826, with a preface more advanced in tone than any the poet had yet published. The verse itself was in every sense newer, especially in the ballads. These were not our modern-antique friends, of which we have had so many lately, the ballad*es* with an *e*—one of those complicated exotic forms of verse from which the real essence of poetry seems somehow to evaporate with such ease. They were ballads with a

story in them, or some fantastic, light, tripping, aërial description of the legendary creatures, sylph or fairy, peri or gnome, that haunted the Middle Age or Eastern imagination. There was a Devil's frolic, and a giant's monologue—things which would have been an abomination to the plain eighteenth century—and there were love-stanzas to a mediæval Madeleine. The whole is full of grace and music.

At the same time Victor Hugo was writing a very serious drama. Whether this play was originally planned for actual performance, is a moot point. In France, as we all know, there is not the same practical divorce that there is in England between literature and the stage. Nearly every French writer of power in verse or fiction feels drawn, sooner or later, into the glare of the foot-lights. There is no inherent improbability therefore, but rather the reverse, in Madame Hugo's statement that her husband thus early felt the general attraction, and wrote his drama with a view to its performance by the great actor Talma. M. Biré, however, doubts the story, and gives cogent reasons for his doubts. I shall not venture to decide between the two. What is certain is that Talma died at about this time, and that "Cromwell," for such was the subject of the piece, soon acquired such gigantic proportions as effectually relegated it to the position of a drama "for the closet."

But if the play was for the closet, the preface was for the battle-field. As Cardinal Newman tells us he has ever dated the beginning of the Tractarian movement from the preaching of Keble's Assize sermon at Oxford, so might many an ardent Romanticist date the origin

of the Romantic movement from the publication of the "Préface de Cromwell" in October, 1827. "It shone in our eyes like the Tables of the Law on Mount Sinai," says Théophile Gautier, "its arguments seemed to us irrefutable." Never did some sixty pages of eloquent prose come into the world with more aggressive opportuneness.

"The present generation," I am quoting Théophile Gautier again, "must have some difficulty in conceiving the state of effervescence in peoples' minds at that time. A movement similar to the Renaissance was in progress. The sap of a new life flowed everywhere impetuously. All things were simultaneously germinating, quickening, burgeoning, bursting into leaf and blossom. The flowers exhaled a passionate perfume, the very air was an intoxicant; we were mad with lyric ardour and art. We seemed to ourselves to have discovered the great lost secret—and so we had, the lost secret of poesy."

It was among minds just ripening for this state of ecstasy that the celebrated "Préface" came like a summons to arms and conquest. Nor did the trumpet now give an uncertain sound. There was no halting, no hesitation any longer, no doubt as to what the difference between the Classic and Romantic schools might happen to be. Boldly, perhaps even rashly, did the writer declare that there had been three ages of poetry, each answering to a given state of society, the ode for primitive times, the epic for antiquity, the drama for to-day. "The ode," so the writer declares, "sings of eternity, the epic solemnizes history, the drama paints life." But to paint life, the drama must often be prepared to set the beautiful to one side. Nay, it is a law of the highest art that the beautiful itself will be enhanced by the juxtaposition of what is ugly. Thus

the grotesque comes into being. As to the "unities," they are naught. As to Racine, he is a "divine poet," if you like, but not a dramatist, not, above all, to be accepted as the typical writer of French verse. And in a brilliant passage the writer describes his ideal of what a dramatic style should be.

"Dramatic verse," he cries, "should be free, frank, direct, sufficiently outspoken to say everything without prudery or affectation; able to pass by natural transition from the comic to the tragic, from the sublime to the grotesque; by turns matter-of-fact and poetical, at once artistic and inspired, profound and full of surprises, large and true; skilful to vary the pauses in the line so as to break the monotony of the alexandrine; rather prone to run a sentence from one line to another than to imbroil it by inversion of the words out of their ordinary sequence; faithful to the rhyme, that queen-slave, that supreme grace of our poetry, that generating power of our verse; inexhaustible in variety; too subtle for analysis in its elegance and technical qualities; able, like Proteus, to take a thousand shapes without changing its real type and character; sober of declamatory speech; playful in the dialogue; faithful to the character of the person represented; mindful to keep its due place, and only beautiful as it were fortuitously, in spite of itself, and unconsciously; by turns lyric, epic, dramatic; able to run over the whole poetic scale, and go from the bottom to the top, from the highest to the most vulgar thoughts, from the most broadly comic to the most grave, from the most concrete to the most abstract, and yet never passing outside the limits of a spoken scene."

Racine not a dramatist! Shakespeare the "highest poetic altitude of modern times"! O evil days, O perversion of public taste! cried the outraged classicists. O dawn of a new and splendid era! answered their Romantic opponents. But Victor Hugo was mindful of the fact that an artist's theories must be proved by his practice, not his reasoning. As Shelley says,

"It is a dangerous invasion
When poets criticise. Their station
Is to delight, not pose."

So together with the "Préface de Cromwell" came "Cromwell" itself. Unfortunately the edifice is, I think, scarcely as striking as the portico. The play is hardly one of the poet's great plays. The whole action turns on Cromwell's desire to be crowned king, and the plot, in so far as it can be called a plot, consists in the exhibition of the various forces opposed to the realization of his wishes—the last words being Cromwell's half-musing aside, "When then shall I be a king?" But even so we scarcely reach a very striking or effective dramatic climax. The first act, I confess, always seems to me better adapted to the libretto of an opera than to a serious historical drama. For there are degrees of admissible improbability even on the stage. We allow a larger latitude to poetry than to prose, and to music than to either. And so it seems to want a chorus of male voices to give even an air of probability to this meeting of Roundheads and Cavaliers, for the most part quite unknown to each other, who have come together in a public tavern-room to declaim treason and conspire against the Protector. How is secrecy imaginable in such conditions without basses and tenors, and a full orchestra?

But lest this criticism should be taxed with frivolity, I hasten to add—what indeed scarcely any one would now think of denying,—that with "Cromwell" the language of the poetical drama in France made an immense stride. And at the same time Victor Hugo

was renovating the language of poetry generally, was reviving ancient and forgotten metres, inventing new metres, and pouring a new and sparkling wine into the old bottles of French verse. The "Chasse du Burgrave," with its echoing rhymes, and the "Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean," are dated respectively January and June, 1828; and in January, 1829, again heralded by a warrior-preface, came out the first edition of the "Orientales."

A brilliant, a superb book. It opens with a description of the cloud from the Lord that broke in fire on Sodom and Gomorrah; and it almost closes with a kind of dreamily expressed desire that the mists on the French horizon should suddenly break, and disclose a Moorish town sending up, like a rocket, through the evening sky, its minarets of gold. But why tantalise the reader thus? An English book is for English readers; else might I here quote freely. And translated verse? A translation that renders the music and colour of the original—that is at once really a translation and really poetry—such a translation is far rarer than a good poem. I am too obviously no Rossetti nor Fitzgerald, and have no intention of courting ruin by an attempt to emulate their renderings of the poetry of early Italy and of Omar's "Eastern lay." Not for me is it to "English" Victor Hugo's masterpieces. I must ask my readers, therefore, if so be that French is unknown to them, to imagine the indolent swaying music to which "Sara the Bather" swings to and fro in her hammock over the waters of the fountain; and the superb march-movement of the "Djinns," those Eastern imps,

who, as the verse swells in syllables and power, seem hurrying from some distance beyond distance till we hear round us the roar of their wings and the tumult of their onset,—sounds that gradually die away as, baffled and beaten, they retreat into the silence from whence they came. I must ask my readers too to take my word for the light that palpitates through it all, and the brilliant colour, and the great variety of tone,—the energy of the ode to Napoleon, the light grace of "Sultan Achmet's" offer of love to the beauty of Grenada, the tragic directness of swift vengeance in the story of the maiden done to death by her brothers because her veil has been uplifted.

That these "Orientales" are of a doubtful Orientalism has been whispered by the erudite. But what can that possibly matter? Byron's "Bride of Abydos," "Giaour," and "Lara," Moore's "Lalla Rookh," these "Orientales" themselves, must be judged as poems, as pieces of art whose "motive" is of the Morning-land, and not merely from the standpoint of the traveller and the historian. And whatever be the verdict on Byron and Moore, there can be no doubt that as pieces of art these poems of Victor Hugo are superb. The workmanship is of the finest quality. This is scarcely the time and place for a discussion on the technicalities of French verse, else might one here descant learnedly on "rich" rhymes, and "supporting consonants," and the "cæsura," and the relations of the sentence to the line. Suffice it to say that judged by the highest standard in such matters, neither the "Orientales," nor any of the other verse of Victor Hugo's maturity, can be found wanting. Does this state-

ment coming from an English critic seem to require support? We may accept the testimony of Théophile Gautier and M. de Banville freely; for if Gautier and M. de Banville are not artists in words, they are nothing; and their reverence for Victor Hugo's technique amounts almost to a superstition.

As to metre, he seemed to play with it. Sainte-Beuve gave him at about this time an old copy of Ronsard, inscribing it to the "greatest lyrical inventor French poetry has known since Ronsard;" and the praise had been fairly won. I shall take but one example from the "Orientales"—the Djinns, to which I have already referred. The first verse is in lines of two syllables, the second verse in lines of three, and so on till the central verse, where ten syllables are reached,—after which the verses decline, in the same way, till the last verse, which consists of lines of two syllables again. A mere feat of verbal juggling the reader will say, and no more to be ranked as poetry than an acrostic. Not at all. The poem is poetry, and poetry of a high order, and the lines of varying length are so used as to emphasize the idea, and give it its fullest force. I know no finer *crescendo* and *diminuendo* in verbal music.

No wonder that poetry of this freshness and beauty, on its first blossoming into that ardent young world, acted as a kind of lyrical intoxicant. No wonder that the youth of the time hailed the writer as their hero, their demi-god. M. Amaury-Duval, writing of days just anterior to these, and of the joyous simple dances in Nodier's rooms at the Library of the Arsenal, says:

"The attitude of the poet in society was quiet and almost grave, and contrasted with a beardless face full of sweetness and charm. He did not take part, like Alfred de Musset[1] and the rest, in our youthful amusements; but the serious side was not really, I think, the most important side of his character. Did he consider it necessary to affect gravity in view of his high mission? If so, he was taking unnecessary trouble: his works alone, and his genius would have sufficed to awe us into respect and admiration."

And Théophile Gautier, writing of the subsequent days of 1830, when the great battle of "Hernani" had been fought and won, tells us of the inward tremors with which he first sought an audience with the "Master,"—of his going three times up the stairs before he mustered courage to ring the bell,—and then, half whimsically, compares his actual entry to that of Esther into the presence of Ahasuerus.

So between 1826 and 1830 was the "Master" held in reverence by the young Romantic school. They gathered round him as round their natural leader. And what brilliant names did the band contain! Sainte-Beuve was one of them. He first made the poet's acquaintance in January, 1827. They were brought together in this way: Sainte-Beuve had written two perfectly independent but sympathetic articles, on the "Odes et Ballades," for the *Globe* newspaper, a very distinguished organ of that time. Victor Hugo called to thank him for the articles. He returned the call, and there resulted a very close intimacy and friendship, destined too soon to pass into indifference and a very armed neutrality. The whole story of their relations is curious. I shall not, however, attempt to write

[1] Who has left so charming a memento of these evenings in the "Réponse à M. Charles Nodier," dated August, 1843.

it here. Suffice it to say, that while the friendship lasted either poet was not without influence on the other, and the flame of mutual admiration flared high. Sainte-Beuve afterwards asserted, in one of his interesting autobiographical notes, written long after this date, that the only time in his life when his singularly fluid nature had been really fixed and congealed was "in Victor Hugo's world," adding, however, that it was "then only by the effect of a charm." And at the time he sang his friend's praises *fortissimo.* As to Victor Hugo, *he*, as we know, always had a tendency to superlatives. There is one of his odes, written in December, 1827, and addressed "To my friend S. B.,"—who can be none other than Sainte-Beuve,—in which he addresses that young gentleman as an "eagle," a "giant," a "star," and exhorts him to make the acquaintance of the lightning, and to roll through the realms of thought like a "royal meteor" with trailing locks. We, who chiefly know a later Sainte-Beuve, can scarcely recognise him in the character of a comet; and, even then, he himself, for he was always very reasonable, must sometimes have smiled at these grandiose epithets. Sitting somewhat apart in the shadow, and rhyming a sonnet to a white cap, or an eye of jet—this is how he lives in Alfred de Musset's reminiscences, and I take it the sketch is truer to nature.

Alfred de Musset—he too was one of the band that pressed round the "Master." Ah, charming and admirable poet, whose verse, to use his own poignant image, always trailed after it a drop of blood—whose life was ruined all the more irretrievably because he had glimpses of a better heaven than that sky of Paris that lowered

above his head—poor "Enfant du Siècle," child of this age of ours which gave its offspring no better refuge against the sorrows of our human lot than drink—surely as a kind of epitaph over his career might fittingly be used those lines of Wordsworth,

> "We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness."

And there is another of Victor Hugo's followers to whom these words would equally apply: poor Gérard de Nerval, who, after leading hither and thither a strange incoherent existence, hanged himself, in a hideous nook of old Paris, in January, 1855. But these are pitiful memories. I must not incongruously forget that we are looking at the generation of 1830 in its spring. There was no thought of the distant days of winter and death when Sainte-Beuve, and Musset, and Gérard de Nerval, and the two Deschamps, and De Vigny, and the exuberant, inexhaustible Dumas, and Delacroix, "the Hugo of paint,"—when all these and many more, poets, writers, artists, used to meet in the brave days of the Romantic movement, and recognized Victor Hugo as their chief.[1]

[1] They called their brotherhood the *Cénacle*, from the upper room in which our Lord had partaken of the Last Supper with His disciples.

## CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE was no effort to be made towards rescuing the French stage from the thraldom of Classicism? Was the "Préface de Cromwell" to remain a barren manifesto, an empty trumpet blast preceding no advance of conquering arms? Was the author of "Cromwell" to rest content with a mere literary triumph, while the theatre could still boast itself unassailed and unwon? Not thus did Victor Hugo understand his duties as leader of the Romantic movement.

And here this England of ours did yeoman's service, and pioneered the attack most effectually. In July and August, 1822, a company of English actors had endeavoured to perform the plays of Shakespeare for the benefit of the Parisian public, but had been met with an organized opposition, and cries of "Speak French," "Down with Shakespeare, he is one of Wellington's aide-de-camps," and other popular amenities of a similar kind. In the latter part of the summer of 1827, the attempt was renewed. The great John Kemble's lesser brother Charles came over from London,—in some trepidation, as his daughter Frances tells us — and with him other English actors and actresses, among

whom was a certain Irish girl called Miss Smithson. They took the fickle Parisians by storm. Since 1822 the Romantic movement had waxed and grown strong. Shakespeare became the rage. That young France in the least understood his language can very safely be denied. But the situations were new and striking, and the whole thing unconventional, and in accord with the whim of the hour. Miss Smithson especially achieved a real triumph,—"received a rather disproportionate share of admiration," is the form in which Frances Kemble puts it. And that fair critic speaks also somewhat slightingly of Miss Smithson's "figure and face of Hibernian beauty," and of her "Irish accent." As to the niceties of the brogue, they were, no doubt, as Frances Kemble says, lost upon French ears, which would know no distinction between the English of Dublin and the English of London. But as for the "Hibernian beauty," most of us, I think, would be inclined to say that the term is scarcely one of reproach, and that Erin's daughters are not among the ill-favoured of the earth. Anyhow, Miss Smithson, brogue, beauty, and all, was for the hour the idol of the French public;—and one Frenchman of genius, Berlioz the composer, the Hugo of music, conceived for her a passion which has become historical, and married her five years afterwards, when her hour of popularity had passed, and she was ruined, and possibly a cripple for life. The Romanticists, it will thus be seen, carried romance beyond the sphere of their art.

Charles Kemble's visit to Paris took place in September, 1827. In October is dated the "Préface de Cromwell." And in the following May, Edmund Kean made a flitting

appearance on the French boards. He was drunk, according to the French tradition, when he came on the stage to play Richard III., and having kept the andience waiting for a very long time, was badly received; but as he warmed to his work, his genius carried all before him. There was no resisting it. And his performance of Shylock, two or three days afterwards, made a lasting impression. I seem to remember, not so very many years ago, a dramatic feuilleton of Jules Janin, the famous critic, in which he spoke of the thrill of horror that went through the house at the deadly realism with which the Jew sharpened his knife upon his sleeve.

So with Shakespeare the romantic drama, in its right royal English dress, first found a place upon the Parisian stage. But obviously that was not enough. To really move a nation's heart, it is imperative to use that nation's speech. A foreign play is for the cultivated few only. It was for the French writers to "dare to follow," now that Shakespeare had "cleared the way." Accordingly, in the early part of 1829, Alexandre Dumas rushed forward with his play of Henry III., which came upon the public as something young, fresh, and full of exuberant life; and, on the 24th of June, Victor Hugo had finished "Marion de Lorme."

The Théâtre Français, the Porte-Saint-Martin, and the Odéon all competed for the play; and the Théâtre Français, as first in the field, was preparing to put it on the stage. But here the Government intervened. There is one of the acts, the fourth, in which Louis XIII. shows pitiably, and as a mere tool in the hands of his imperious minister, Cardinal Richelieu. Now

in July, 1829, the monarchy of the elder branch of the Bourbons was tottering to its fall. The attacks made upon it from all sides were incessant and most bitter. The king especially was accused of being under priestly government. M. de Martignac, the Home Minister, may therefore be forgiven if he thought the moment inopportune for the production of a play which might easily be used politically as a weapon of offence. Naturally Victor Hugo took a different view. He appealed from the minister to the king. The king granted him a private audience on the 7th of August; received him with the greatest affability and kindness; but, on reflection, did not see that it would be safe to yield. He, however, as some indemnity, offered the poet an increase of 2000 francs to his existing pensions. This Victor Hugo thought it right to refuse, though in most loyal, and one may almost say humble, terms; whereupon he became more popular than ever, and the opposition journals talked of his incorruptibility.

But, as Madame Hugo rightly says, "Victor Hugo was not one of those men who are discouraged by a check." He at once set to work, began "Hernani" on the 29th of August, and, on the 1st of October, read it to the Committee of the Théâtre Français.

Then there ensued, as before, a great battle, a series of skirmishes, excursions and alarums, affairs of outposts. On the 18th of December Victor Hugo wrote to a friend:

"You know that I am overwhelmed, overburdened, crushed, throttled. The Comédie Française, 'Hernani,' the rehearsals, the green-room rivalries of actors and actresses, the intrigues of the newspapers and the police; and, on the other hand, my private affairs, which are much embroiled, my father's inheritance not yet

settled, our property in Spain of which Ferdinand VII. has taken possession, the compensation due to us in Saint Domingo and kept back by Boyer, our sands at Sologne which have been on sale for the last twenty-three months, our houses in Blois which our step-mother is trying to keep away from us, consequently nothing, or next to nothing, to be saved out of the wreck of a considerable fortune. Such is my life."

Not a very happy picture, certainly. But our immediate interest is with those special troubles that thickened round the production of "Hernani." To begin with, the performers were hostile. Mdlle. Mars, the great tragic actress, on whom had naturally devolved the chief part of Doña Sol, was a woman of fifty, and had little sympathy, as may be supposed, with novelties. Alexandre Dumas relates, in his sparkling way, how she would interrupt the rehearsals again and again, and worry the poor author with poetical suggestions. It was not till he threatened to take the part from her that she was brought to reason. Her frigidity froze the other actors; and the bitterness of a terrible winter tended to freeze them still more. Meanwhile the press was not idle. Scraps and detached passages of the play leaked out, and were travestied and ridiculed. One scene was burlesqued upon the stage. The censorship also "made its reserves," contested the admissibility of certain passages, insisted upon changes in various lines, had to be reasoned with, bullied, cajoled. Finally the *claque*, the paid applauders who in a French theatre direct the popular enthusiasm, turned mutinous. Their loyalty could not be depended upon. They might even desert in the hour of battle, and go over to the enemy.

But against all forms of opposition, whether open and

angry, or occult and insidious, Victor Hugo showed a most admirable tenacity and courage. "We should not, perhaps, be able fully to understand the essentially militant character of his political and literary life," says Madame Hugo, "if we did not know from what a soldier-family he sprang." And here he showed himself a born fighter. If the *claque*, those hired mercenaries, would not support his cause, he would rely on the enthusiasm of volunteers. Word went forth among the students of the "Quartier Latin," the younger journalists, the artists going through their apprenticeship in the various "ateliers," that the future of the French drama, nay, of French poetry itself, was at stake. Théophile Gautier has told how Gérard de Nerval acted as recruiting sergeant, and went round distributing tickets for the first performance, and with what a passion of joy he, Gautier, received six orders, in solemn trust, with an adjuration to bring none but sure hands. Each ticket bore inscribed upon it the Spanish word, *hierro*, "iron."

And what a strange young generation they were to whom this call was addressed! Together with a genuine enthusiasm for everything relating to art, using the word in its most extended sense, how much of folly and wilful eccentricity! Eccentricity, indeed, was their goddess. They hated with an undying hate the peaceful "bourgeois" who paid his debts, lived cleanly, foreswore sack, and cultivated only the prose of life. Such a man, according to one of these cannibalistic young gentlemen, was only fit to be eaten. To "asphyxiate" him "with the smell of punch, patchouli, and cigars"[1] seemed a desirable object.

[1] The expression is that of Gavarni the great caricaturist, who, however, came into vogue a little later.

To adopt a name that could by no means be mistaken for *his* commonplace name was a clear duty. Thus, if the Romantic aspirant had been christened "Jean," he added a mediæval *h*, and called himself "Jehan;" if his name were plain "Pierre," he called himself "Petrus." Or else he gave a kind of pseudo-foreign air to his cognomen, and "Auguste Maquet" became "Augustus McKeat," and "Théophile Dondey" became "Philothée O'Neddy." There was one daring spirit who even ventured to designate himself as "Napoleon Tom." Napoleon Tom! I declare there is a touch of genius in the combination. When one thinks of it, when one considers the absurdity of these outlandish designations, even the inexplicable seems streaked with a dawn of explanation, and one almost ceases to wonder whence Victor Hugo derived the amazing English names in "L'Homme qui rit." Even "Govicum," the pot-boy, and "Lord Tom Jim Jack," seem to have prototypes.

Nor were outward and visible signs of eccentricity wanting in the youthful band that crowded round the door of the pit of the Théâtre Français on the memorable 25th of February, 1830, when "Hernani" was to be first presented to the public. They have been often described. According to Madame Hugo they were "strange, uncouth, bearded, long-haired, dressed in every manner except according to the existing fashion, in loose jerkins, in Spanish cloaks, in Robespierre waistcoats, in Henry III. bonnets, having every century and every country upon their shoulders and heads." No wonder that the peaceful burgesses were "stupefied and indignant." Théophile Gautier especially "insulted their

eyes." His locks, like those of Albert Dürer, flowed far over his shoulders, and he wore a scarlet satin waistcoat of mediæval cut, a black coat with broad velvet facings, trousers of a pale sea-green seamed with black velvet, and an ample grey overcoat lined with green satin. Well might he speak enthusiastically, in after years, of the "phantasy of individual taste" that had "regulated" the "costumes" of the "champions of the ideal" who waited outside the Théâtre Français. His encomiums on their "just sense of colour" one feels inclined, in view of the sea-green trousers, to accept more doubtfully. As to the scarlet waistcoat, it has a place in history. It flames in the forefront of the Romantic battle like the white plume of King Henry of Navarre at Ivry.

Our young friends were admitted into the theatre at two, and the public were not to enter till seven. What was to be done meanwhile in the great ghostly unlit place? Talk offered a resource, and cat-calls, and endless songs, which the Government papers of the following day described as "impious," and the opposition journals as "obscene." The more prudent of the band had provided themselves with sausages, ham, chocolate, and bread; and an improvised pic-nic made the time pass pleasantly. When the audience began to assemble, they were greeted by a fine smell of garlic. O abomination of desolation! This is the holy of holies of the drama, in the "House of Molière"! Mdlle. Mars was furious. She had acted, she declared to Victor Hugo, before every kind of public; it was to him, to him that she must owe the indignity of acting before such a public as *that!*

However at last the performance began, and began coldly. But, as it proceeded, the admirable vigour of the verse, and, one may add, the stage effectiveness of the situations, began to produce their due effect. At the second act, where Hernani and Don Carlos, rivals in their love for Doña Sol, exchange words of hate and defiance, the clapping of the author's followers found an echo in a few boxes. This temporary success was, however, jeopardised by the scene in which Don Ruy Gomez too lengthily catalogues his pictured ancestry on the wall; though, in the end, his refusal to violate his ideal of hospitality at Don Carlos' bidding, "brought down the house." Strangely enough, Charles V.'s long monologue before the tomb of Charlemagne first really clinched success and made victory certain. Poetry went for something in those days, and undramatic as that soliloquy may be, each line, as it flashed upon the audience, woke in them a growing enthusiasm. Before the applause had died down, an unknown publisher accosted the author, and offered six thousand francs for the right to publish the play, saying that at the end of the second act he had intended to propose two thousand francs, at the end of the third four, and that he should greatly prefer to close the bargain there and then, as at the end of the performance he might be tempted to give ten thousand. Victor Hugo, whose whole possessions happened at the moment to consist of fifty francs, or £2, laughingly concluded the bargain.

The fifth act was a triumph. Mdlle. Mars acted it superbly. In her love duet with Hernani—that duet which vaguely reminds one of the duet between Juliet

and Romeo,—her voice rendered admirably the music of the verse, and thrilled to its emotions. When Ruy Gomez, having first sounded his fatal horn, came to claim Hernani's life, she sprang up with an energy which was new even to her admirers, like a tiger in defence of her whelps.—And we too have seen that act not inadequately performed. We too have heard a silvery voice descanting sweetest love-music with Hernani; have watched the dawning horror on the face as the meaning of Ruy Gomez' visit became apparent; have seen the frail shape dilate in fierce defiance, and then sink down in passionate appeal for mercy; have noted how, amid the gathering darkness of death, love still flickered on in look and speech. So does Sarah Bernhardt act the part of Doña Sol; and to those who have seen the play thus acted it will scarcely seem strange that the first performance of "Hernani" came to a successful close.

But how about the second performance, when the appeal would be to the general public, not the cultured few? The first performance had been like Ligny or Quatre Bras before Waterloo. The great battle had still to be fought. And fiercely did it rage. Verse after verse, as the play went on, was assailed with Homeric laughter. Victor Hugo's friends replied with volley on volley of applause. And so again the toilsome evening wore through. Nor was this yet in any wise the end. After the third performance, the author had only one hundred tickets at his disposal; and the enemy were more eager than ever in the attack.

"Then indeed," says Madame Hugo, "did the real struggle begin. Each performance became an indescribable tumult. The

boxes sneered and tittered ; the stalls whistled ; it became a fashionable pastime to go 'and laugh at "Hernani."' Every one protested after his own manner, and according to his individual nature. Some, as not being able to bear to look at such a piece, turned their backs to the performers ; others declared aloud that they could stand it no longer, and went out in the middle of the acts, and banged the doors of their boxes as they went. The more peaceable . . . . ostentatiously spread out and read their newspapers."

For five and forty nights did the actors and Victor Hugo's volunteers stand in the breach and carry performance after performance to the end ; and it was not till June 18, 1830, when Mdlle. Mars required a holiday, that the piece was withdrawn.

Thus was fought and won the great battle, or rather campaign, of "Hernani." Romantic drama had made good its position on the French stage.

And shall we throw up our caps at the victory, and cry huzza with the "hirsute generation"[1] of 1830? Yes and no, I think. Dante, as it has always seemed to me, and I say it reverently, strikes a false note when he tells how—

> "Cimabue thought
> To lord it over painting's field, but hark !
> The cry's Giotto's, and his name eclipsed ;"

for the success of an artist in no sense detracts from the merits of his predecessors. And so, though quite prepared to admit that the French stage stood in need of a revival at the beginning of this century, and that the classical drama was senile and dying, yet am I not prepared to say that the French classical drama, in its first vigour and freshness, was anything but a superb

[1] M. Zola's expression, "la race chevelue."

product. Of course we must judge it by standards different from those which we are in the habit of applying. Taking Shakespeare as our great exemplar, what we look for, what delights us, in the higher drama, is an infinite play of life, a large variety of character, the evidence, in conception and language, of unrestrained power—power braving all danger, heedless of difficulty, and grandly daring if, by any means, it can enlarge the scope of art. The ideals of the French dramatists of the great period, Racine, Corneille, Molière, were quite other. What they aimed at was rather to circumscribe than to enlarge, rather to select, simplify, and concentrate than to hold the mirror up to nature, and show life in all its complexity. Shakespeare, having to paint a lover and jealous husband in Othello, gives to the love and jealousy, all important as they are, only a relative influence in the man's portrait. Othello—the soldier so essentially a soldier that he regards even the peaceful time of his courtship as "wasted,"—has a being and personality apart from his relations with Desdemona. Racine would have treated the story quite differently. *His* Othello would have been a lover, and jealous—and have been nothing else. Our whole attention would have been concentrated on that one point. The poet would have held himself false to his art if he had endeavoured to amuse us with matters which he, justly or unjustly, regarded as of secondary interest. Not love and jealousy under certain particular circumstances, and in a given individual of warlike habits and dark complexion,—but love and jealousy apart from all such adjuncts, and in their most concentrated form—such,

according to his conception, would have been the proper matter of a drama. A false conception, the English reader is at once tempted to exclaim. And yet I don't know. It seems to me at least a perfectly admissible conception. Granting at once, and of course, that Shakespeare's art is unapproachable, yet it does not follow that there is no room in the world for art of another kind. And if we once allow this, then can we certainly not withhold our meed of admiration from those whose art of that other kind was perfect. Nay, as regards Shakespeare himself, is the advantage in artistic method so invariably on his side? Does he always profit by giving full rein to the power that is in him? Take Timon of Athens and compare him with Alceste, the misanthrope of Molière. Timon, in his hatred for his fellows, almost casts away his humanity, and lowers himself to the level of one of Swift's yahoos. Alceste, so far from dropping his humanity, remains a gentleman. Here we have, on the one side, unbridled power; and, on the other, measure, restraint, reasonableness, tact. The art in which these qualities attained their highest ideal, as they did in the work of the French poets of the seventeenth century, is, of its own kind, great art.

However, though the subject is alluring, I must not be tempted to dwell on the beauties of Racine, Corneille, Molière, and of Lafontaine whose verse is as the very daintiest goldsmith's work in human language. My immediate purpose will be sufficiently answered if I have made it clear that the Classical party had something to say for itself when opposing "Hernani."

That play was first produced on the 25th of

February, 1830. It was followed on the 11th of August, 1831, by "Marion de Lorme," which had been previously prohibited by the Government of Charles X. This was followed in turn, on the 22nd of November, 1832, by "Le Roi s'amuse," which seems to have been made the occasion of a political manifesto, and was prohibited by the Government of Louis Philippe. Then came "Lucrèce Borgia," in the beginning of 1833; "Marie Tudor," on the 6th of November in the same year; "Angelo Tyran de Padoue," on the 28th of April, 1835; "Ruy Blas," on the 8th of November, 1838; and, finally, "Les Burgraves," on the 8th of March, 1843. The last-named failed to secure such success as to tempt Victor Hugo to work any more for the stage. It was only performed some thirty times, and met with great opposition.

And of the plays which Victor Hugo thus composed in view of the footlights, what shall we say? Clearly in composing them he was animated by the very highest literary ambition. It is difficult to read the "Préface de Cromwell," and the prefaces to each of the plays, without coming to the conclusion that he had braced himself to no less a task than taking the drama where Shakespeare left it, and carrying it to greater heights of historical accuracy and social and philosophic truth. A magnificent ideal without doubt; and to the honour due to those who fail in the greatest attempts, he is unquestionably entitled. For failure to reach such high altitude, there obviously is. Of Victor Hugo's social philosophy I shall have occasion to speak hereafter. Suffice it to say here that one can scarcely think without a smile of the light

in which it would have appeared to Shakespeare's pre-eminently large and equitable spirit. Nor can the historical pretensions be taken very seriously. This is a point on which Victor Hugo seems clearly to have been in the habit of deceiving himself. In his view, it was part of his mission as a playwright to "explain history;" and in a note to "Marie Tudor" he says:

> "So that the reader may be in a position, once for all, to appreciate the more or less of historical certainty contained in the author's works, as also the quantity and quality of historical research undertaken by him in view of each of his dramas, he thinks it his duty to print here, as a specimen, the list of the books and documents consulted in writing 'Marie Tudor.' He could publish a similar catalogue as regards each of his other pieces."

The list thus announced with some little pomp is only calculated to inspire a moderate amount of confidence. It contains more than one obvious misnomer, and opens with a history of Henry VII. by "Franc Baronum," who cannot well be any other than our old acquaintance Francis Bacon. But, to let such trifles pass, what is of infinitely greater importance, the character of Queen Mary, as presented in the drama, is quite unhistorical and false. Poor Bloody Mary, we know her story very well. It has been told for us, with even more than his customary picturesqueness and skill, by Mr. Froude. It has been dramatised for us by Lord Tennyson.

> "Mother of God,
> Thou knowest never woman meant so well,
> And fared so ill in this disastrous world.
> My people hate me and desire my death.
> . . . . My hard father hated me;
> My brother rather hated me than loved;
> My sister cowers and hates me. . . .
> My husband hates me and desires my death."

Poor virtuous Mary, with the bigot-creed and the narrow intellect, who worked such ruin even to the cause she loved, who having the lion spirit of her race, yet did such jackal's work,—and all the time hungered so in her woman's heart for the child that never came and the love that never was hers—surely there is scarce a more pathetic figure in history. The Mary of Victor Hugo is the paramour of I know not what Italian adventurer, and prepared at any moment to cry her shame to the whole court, to her future husband's ambassador, to anybody who will listen. No one, however great he may be, has a right to play such fantastic tricks with a real character —still less to call the bespattering, history.

But if Victor Hugo has failed to improve on Shakespeare's social philosophy or history, has he at least equalled him in peopling the stage with living, acting, feeling, thinking men and women—human creatures of intensest vitality, but whose characters will yet bear the most minute dissection? No, no, the later poet, great as he is, has not done this. I am far from agreeing with those critics, as M. Zola for instance, who hold that all his *dramatis personæ* are mere marionettes, tricked out in doublet and trunk-hose, ruff and farthingale, all the frippery of any particular time, and with wood, wire, and bran where flesh, nerves, and blood should be. But if this is malevolent exaggeration, yet is it unfortunately true that in many of his characters, and those often the most important, a certain mechanical something is too obvious. Explaining the genesis of Triboulet, in "Le Roi s'amuse," and Lucrèce Borgia, in the play of the same name, the author tells us—

"'Take the most hideous, repulsive, complete physical deformity; place it where it will be most striking—at the lowest, meanest, most despised stage of the social edifice; light up that miserable creature from all sides with the sinister light of contrast; and then throw into him a soul, and put into that soul the purest feeling given to man, the feeling of fatherhood. What will happen? Why that sublime feeling, heated according to certain conditions, will transform before your eyes the degraded creature; the being that was small will become great; the being that was deformed will become beautiful. In its essence this is 'Le Roi s'amuse.' Well, and it is also 'Lucrèce Borgia.' Take the most hideous, repulsive, complete moral deformity; place it where it will be most striking, in a woman's heart, with all such adjuncts of physical beauty and royal grandeur as may give prominence to crime; and now mingle with all this deformity a pure feeling, the purest feeling that a woman can experience, the feeling of motherhood; in your monster place a mother's heart; and the monster will become interesting; and the monster will make you weep; and that créature that inspired only terror, will excite pity, and that deformed soul will become almost beautiful in your eyes. Thus fatherhood sanctifying physical deformity—that is what we have in 'Le Roi s'amuse;' motherhood sanctifying moral deformity—that is what we have in 'Lucrèce Borgia.'"

To me, I confess, in all this there is something mechanical and forced. Human characters are not compact of such tremendous contrasts. Certainly a monster like Triboulet—for in moral repulsiveness he is pretty nearly the fellow of Lucrèce—may love his offspring. Love is a flower that will grow almost anywhere. But it is scarcely a flower that will give out its fullest, purest perfume when growing out of so polluted a soil. And the attempt to excite interest by dwelling on the difference between soil and product can only lead to exaggeration and falsehood. Or take again the character of Marion de Lorme. Marion de Lorme is a noted courtesan.

Her life is a byword. Scarce a noble about the Court but can boast of her favours. Yet she becomes again all dainty-pure, as in her maidenhood, through her love for Didier. In other words, she abandons the world of realities, and becomes an antithesis.

Nor is it possible to place such lover-heroes as Hernani, Didier, and Ruy Blas beside Shakespeare's real men. They belong, all three of them, to a distinctly obsolete Byronic type, and talk too gloomily and too much of the fates, and destiny, and evil stars, and such other moody and uncomfortable matters. As to Ruy Blas, I go even further, and express disbelief in him altogether. What! here is a poet of fine intellect and noblest sentiments, though wearing, for the sake of contrast, a lackey's coat; he is in love with the queen; he is left behind at Court by his master, for wicked purposes, in a position of power, and displays in that position the highest qualities of a statesman and a patriot: and yet, when his master comes back—a step which even imbecility might have anticipated—and declares an intention of dishonouring the queen, he, the poet and man of action, can find nothing better to do than whine like a whipped cur—no more effective way of defending his love than praying in churches and wandering about the streets! Bah! any man with a spark of manhood—having such advantages on his side too—would have made short work of Don Salluste de Bazan. Ruy Blas does not hold together as a man, a poet, a statesman, or a lackey. The best criticism on his character and conduct remains that of the spectators in the gallery when the play was first produced. They, we are told, used to cry out in their

jargon, as he stooped down to pick up his master's handkerchief, "Don't pick it up, you fool; have him run in."

A second Shakespeare? Hardly. Superb as are Victor Hugo's gifts, he is unable to sustain that comparison. But still, without being a Shakespeare, it is possible to be a very powerful dramatist; and Victor Hugo's plays possess merits of the highest kind. Of course, in judging them, we must always bear in mind that they were written directly in view of the stage. They are not, like Mr. Browning's dramas, for example, literature and literature alone. They are intended, and rightly, to show life according to theatrical conditions and as seen through an atmosphere of stage illusion. And when so regarded their strong points are not to be gainsaid. Each is constructed on lines so large and easily intelligible as not to disconcert the average spectator. The introduction is in every case deftly managed: we are placed at once, without long and tedious explanations, in the centre of the subject. The plot is skilfully combined for the purpose of exciting curiosity and retaining interest. If the incidents are too often those of a melodrama, and are caused rather by what may be called accident than development of character, yet no one can deny their stage effectiveness, and the opportunities they afford to the actor. Doña Sol (in "Hernani"), Marion de Lorme, the Queen (in "Ruy Blas"), have each the most excellent parts. So has Triboulet, whatever we may think, on reflection, of his truth to nature. No one who has seen M. Coquelin as Don César, that roystering, brave, black-

guard cavalier, can have any doubt of the author's power to produce a strongly vitalised character, at least for the stage. And to these gifts we must add a singular power in the management of dialogue. This, however, is praise which must be mainly restricted to the dramas in verse. For, by a singular phenomenon, the personages in Victor Hugo's stage-world speak far less naturally and forcibly when speaking in prose than when speaking to the cadence of metre. The difficulties of rhyme seem to nerve the dramatist to greater efforts, just as a minor poet will often succeed better in a sonnet than a simple ballad. So here the dialogue when in verse is almost invariably natural, alert, incisive, quick in thrust and parry as a rapier, now flashing with the brightest gems of imagination, now trembling with passion or sorrow.

Yet there are critics ready enough to tell us that, even from the stage point of view, Victor Hugo's "theatre" "threatens ruin," nay, that it lies in ruins already. Such critics hold that his art has permanently lost its power to charm and electrify an audience, and can never again possess more than an interest of literary curiosity. But this surely is altogether an exaggeration. I am prepared to give over to the tormentors the plays in prose, "Angelo," "Marie Tudor," and "Lucrèce Borgia"; for Victor Hugo, when writing these dramas in prose, became as one who throws away his arms in the hour of battle, and courts defeat. I am ready to allow that "Les Burgraves," notwithstanding the great power of the verse, is constructed on lines too large and epic for the modern stage,—that Barbarossa waking white-haired at his country's need from his immemorial

slumber, and the other old Rhineland demigods, with their hatreds that endure threescore years and ten, are fitter for the twilight of imagination than the comparative reality of the theatre. Even stage illusion cannot raise mere flesh and blood to such heroic proportions. But "Hernani," and "Marion de Lorme" and "Ruy Blas"? Time has told on them no doubt. Fashions change in fifty years. Yet to the criticism that holds them to be moribund or dead, one may fitly answer that there is in each a soul of poetry that will for ever keep it alive. Grant that in certain respects they are rather melodramas than dramas, yet are they melodramas set to incomparable verse. Music will make them immortal, a kind of superb verbal orchestra tion that for variety and power, for "sonority" and brilliance of effect, has no equal in French dramatic verse. Even if they had no other excellences, they would live,—as an opera may live though the libretto is naught. Never, I think, will the time come when such stage music will altogether fail of its appeal.

Was the "name" of "Cimabue" so entirely "eclipsed" when Giotto arose over the horizon? Did Racine and classic tragedy entirely suffer defeat in the great battle of "Hernani"? Between 1830 and 1838, "Hernani," "Marion de Lorme," "Le Roi s'amuse," "Lucrèce Borgia," "Marie Tudor," "Angelo," and "Ruy Blas" strutted bravely on the boards. But in those same years there was "a certain sorry little scrub," who "went up and down" Paris, "none" much "caring how;" and that "little scrub"—a lean slip of a girl, with intense dark Jew eyes, who bore the name of Rachel,—

proved to have power enough, when once her genius had declared itself, to stem the onset of Romanticism, and in her turn to take the world by storm with the old classic drama. Not as Doña Sol, Marion de Lorme, nor the Queen of Spain, did the incomparable actress[1] achieve her triumphs. Fine as these parts are, she felt that in such characters as Racine's Phèdre there is a deeper, more poignant life; that through all changes of dramatic form the heart-strings of humanity are more passionately a-quiver in the older plays. And so once again Racine's beautiful old word-music, which is, as one may say, so purely of the strings, prevailed on the French stage.

But Victor Hugo's more varied orchestra of words and effects has in turn had its revivals, and that three at least of his plays will live, and live for the stage, I make no question.

[1] Victor Hugo, characteristically, thought little of Rachel.

## CHAPTER VI.

"VICTOR in drama" with "Hernani," Victor in poetry with "Les Orientales," it remains for us now to consider Hugo as "Victor in romance"[1] with "Nôtre Dame de Paris." But in order to do this, I must retrace my steps somewhat. His last play, "Les Burgraves," was produced in 1843; and to take up the thread of the novels it is necessary to go back some twenty years, to 1823 when "Han d'Islande" was first published.

Of that book I have already spoken; nor is it necessary to say more about it here. It is in every sense a juvenile production, and only interesting as the start-point of a great career. Three years afterwards, in January, 1826, appeared "Bug Jargal." That short novel had indeed seen the light already in an earlier, simpler, and shorter form. It had been first written, according to the preface of 1832, in 1818, when the author was sixteen years old—written for a wager in fifteen days, and published in the *Conservateur Littéraire.* But in 1826 it reappeared in its present shape, greatly altered, and, in fact, rewritten. It must there-

[1] See first line of Lord Tennyson's Sonnet to Victor Hugo:

"Victor in drama, Victor in romance."

fore be regarded as the author's first step, or rather stride forward in novel-writing, after "Han d'Islande."

"Bug Jargal" is a story of the rising of the slaves in St. Domingo. The author supposes that in 1793, or thereabouts, a number of French officers determine to relate their adventures for the purpose of beguiling the tedium of the long evenings by the camp fire. When Captain Léopold d'Auverney's turn comes round, he first declares that there has been nothing in his career worthy of fixing their attention. But then being pressed, he tells his tale. Though not born in St. Domingo he had been brought up there, and was living with his uncle, and betrothed to Marie his beautiful cousin. One of the slaves, a negro prince in his native Africa, also entertains for Marie a passionate attachment. This slave, Bug Jargal by name, is as generous as he is brave, fulfilled with every noble sentiment, a hero of romance. Jealousy against his white rival finds no lasting home in his breast. He tramples it under foot, and swears eternal friendship and brotherhood. On the very night of D'Auverney's marriage the insurrection breaks out. Murder, incendiarism, outrage, stalk through the island. The bride and bridegroom have been separated by an untoward chance. Bug Jargal saves the former, and, afterwards, when D'Auverney is taken prisoner, and is about to be tortured to death, saves him too. He himself is shot by a lamentable accident. As to Marie she soon dies; and D'Auverney also, shortly afterwards, finds an end to his sorrows, for within a few days of the telling of his tale, he falls on the field of battle.

Such, very shortly stated, is the story of Bug Jargal; and it is told with unmistakable power and interest. That the hero's character is altogether life-like I will not affirm. Negroes, or even white men, of his stamp are rare. But in the world of art there is room for more than the prose of our every-day experience; and though Carlyle would certainly have objected to recognise the possibility of "the hero as nigger," we need scarcely be so exclusive. Decidedly the culminating point of the story is the description of the struggle between D'Auverney and a hideous, powerful hunchback, Habibrah, on the brink of a yawning gulf in a cavern. The prentice hand that wrought that scene was rapidly becoming the master hand that would produce the scene in which Claude Frollo falls from the topmost tower of Nôtre Dame.

Victor Hugo's next venture in fiction was "Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné," the "last day of a man condemned to death." This book appeared anonymously[1] in February, 1829, just three years after "Bug Jargal," and a month, it may be remembered, after the "Orientales." It appeared therefore when the author was in the plenitude of his powers; and a remarkable harrowing book it distinctly is. A story? No, not exactly a story. Rather a psychological study, an endeavour to sound, with the plummet of imagination, the dark places in the soul of a man who has forfeited his life to human justice, and is about to be launched into eternity. The book is autobiographical in form, and the supposed writer describes the ghostly march of his own emotions through

[1] In the third edition, however, also dated 1829, and now before me, Victor Hugo's name is given on the title-page.

the horror of great darkness by which he is surrounded. He is evidently an educated man, a man not at all vitiated by a career of crime, but blameless except in respect of the one act that has brought him to this extremity. His kindlier better feelings are unimpaired. He thinks of his mother, his wife, his child—"a little girl of three years old, gentle, rosy, frail, with large black eyes and long auburn locks." The shame that will splash up to them from his spilt life tortures him. In the midst of the ghastly nightmare of his waking and sleeping existence come visions of his childhood—of a garden—(Ah ! poet, was not that a reminiscence of the Feuillantines and thine own child-love ?)—in which he was wont to play with a little dark-eyed Spanish girl, till one day, as they read a book together, like Paolo and Francesca in the "Inferno," their lips met, and "On that day they read no more therein." Then he tries to look death in the face, but it daunts him. Anon he rages like some trapped animal; and so he passes to his hideous end.

Victor Hugo describes the man's torture well. The writer who afterwards pictured so vividly the storm of guilty love that raged in the heart of Claude Frollo the priest, and the fierce battle of rectitude against self-preservation in the brain of Jean Valjean, was not likely to fail when dealing with such a theme. Nor does it at all impair the artistic merit of the book, viewed as a psychological story, that the evil deed by which the condemned man has brought himself within the clutches of the law should be kept so entirely out of sight. Accepting the author's first description of his work as that of a "dreamer," a "philosopher," a "poet," bent on

"observing nature for the benefit of art," then have we comparatively little concern with the specific murder committed. Our interest is properly concentrated on the criminal, not the victim.

Directly, however, the author changes his front, as he did after the issue of the first few editions, and asks us to regard his book mainly as a serious argument in favour of the abolition of capital punishment, then one has a right to ask what crime had this amiable murderer committed. Doubtless it was a hard thing that he should be made to walk through the valley of the shadow of death prematurely, and in this particularly horrible manner. Yet, after all, the act for which he suffered was his own. But his victim, how had he deserved death? The light of the sun was as pleasant to him as to his murderer. Life smiled with equal kindliness on both. If it were repugnant to the one to be executed, it must have been far from agreeable to the other to be poisoned, throttled, or shot. And *he* had no choice in the matter. He was but a passive agent; while the poor criminal, with whose pains we are called upon to sympathise, might have kept his life out of jeopardy by simply observing the most ordinary rules of moral conduct. Surely the sufferings of the murderer constitute in this matter no argument at all. To dwell upon them eloquently, passionately, and to keep the sufferings of the victim out of sight, is to appeal to emotion and prejudice, not reason. Viewed as a pamphlet in favour of the abolition of capital punishment, the "Dernier Jour" is singularly inconclusive.

Unfortunately a similar weakness runs through nearly

all Victor Hugo's polemics on the question. It was Alphonse Karr, if I remember right, who wittily observed that he saw no objection to the abolition of capital punishment, but thought "Messieurs the assassins" ought first to show the way. Victor Hugo saw no necessity for that preliminary step on the assassins' part. Of course it was wrong to commit murder, very wrong; but the wrong was not of such a nature as to make the murderer liable to forfeit his own life in return. No wrong could be heinous enough for that. Judging on *à priori* grounds, he held strongly that society does not possess the right, even in self-defence, to cut short the existence of any of its members. Into the question whether that particular form of punishment was best calculated to act as a preventive for that particular class of crime, he seldom entered.

Nor can it be denied that something morbid mingled at last with Victor Hugo's genuine sympathy for any man condemned to death. In October, 1853, a murder was committed in Guernsey. The murderer, a sort of Government clerk called Tapner, belonged essentially to the class of human vermin. He was drunken; he was debauched. He lived with two sisters, of whom one was his wife, and the other his mistress. He had committed his crime with premeditation, and under circumstances of peculiar atrocity, first killing and robbing his victim—a woman—and then setting fire to her house to obliterate all traces of his deed. He was more than suspected of having done the same thing before. Of his guilt there could be no manner of question; and the law sentenced him to its extreme penalty. Whereupon Victor Hugo

moved heaven and earth to save the man; and from his point of view was, of course, quite justified in so doing. But when the law had taken its course, and no mark of interest or sympathy could be of further practical avail, he made a kind of pilgrimage to the scenes—hallowed, I was going to say, by Tapner's presence. He visited the dead man's cell, followed his course to the place of execution, moralised on the view to be seen from the spot, hunted up and examined the gibbet in an out-house where it had been deposited, purchased for three francs a posthumous cast of the deceased's head, and finally discovered the place of interment, and gathered a bunch of grass from the grave. After this, I think Victor Hugo is a little hard upon the inhabitants of Guernsey for their eagerness to possess small pieces of the rope as relics.

But if the description of this pilgrimage, in the author's "Choses Vues," rings a little false, it would be unjust not to recognise that the passionate zeal with which he strove to give effect to his convictions respecting the abolition of capital punishment were worthy of all praise. The cause was dear to his heart, and to the hearts of his sons. One of the latter suffered imprisonment for it in 1851. He himself gave it time and energy without stint—was instant in its advocacy, in season and out of season. Never did he omit an opportunity of urging with tongue and pen that the existing laws should be changed;—never did he forbear to plead for the life of any one condemned to death whose case came under his notice. From John Brown, the martyr of negro emancipation, down to wretches like Tapner, the large mantle of his clemency would have been thrown

over all without distinction. And that his zeal to save even the most criminal life came of a strong humanity, there can be no doubt.

But all this has led us a little away from the series of his earlier novels—which is our immediate subject. The "Dernier Jour" was published in 1829. In February to June, 1830, came the battle of "Hernani." In July, 1830, the monarchy of the elder branch of the Bourbons passed away, and Louis Philippe was made King of the French. And in the autumn and winter of the same year, Victor Hugo was hard at work on a novel of greater scale than he had yet attempted. He had, some little time before, incautiously entered into an engagement with a publisher to write the book by a given time. That time had passed. Something had angered the publisher. Law proceedings were threatened. Haste was imperative. The poet, as Madame Hugo tells us, "purchased a bottle of ink, and a great grey knitted woollen wrapper that covered him from his neck to his toes; locked up all his clothing so that he might have no temptation to go out; and entered into his novel as if it had been a prison. . . . Thenceforward he never left his desk save to eat and sleep. His only relaxation was an hour's after-dinner chat with a few friends, to whom he sometimes read the pages written during the day." "He had been," Madame Hugo adds, "very melancholy" when his incarceration began. But "with the first few chapters, his melancholy departed; his creation seized hold of him; he felt neither weariness nor the winter's cold; in December he worked with his windows open." And well might an inner fire of enthu-

siasm give heat to that almost monastic seclusion of five months' duration. The poet-novelist was at work upon a master-piece. On the 13th of February, 1831, appeared "Nôtre Dame de Paris."

A great book, a magnificent book most unquestionably, a book before which the critic may fitly throw down all his small artillery of carpings and quibblings, and stand disarmed and reverent. That Victor Hugo had realised his ambition of crowning with poetry the prose of Sir Walter Scott, I shall not affirm. But then it scarcely seems as if any such crowning were needed, or possible; for the good Sir Walter's faults lay neither in lack of imagination, nor lack of fervour, nor an absence of elevation of tone, nor, in short, in a deficiency of aught that goes to the making of poetry. "Quentin Durward" deals with the same period as "Nôtre Dame de Paris," and if one places the two books side by side in one's thoughts, such differences as there are will hardly seem to be differences in degree of poetical inspiration. Our own great novelist's work is fresher, healthier perhaps, more of the open air. A spirit of hopefulness and youth and high courage seems to circulate through his pages—a sort of pervading trust that the good things of this world come to those who deserve them, that merit has its prizes, and unworthiness its punishments. There is blood enough and to spare in the book, and a good deal of hanging and much villany. But our feelings are not greatly harrowed thereby. We need not weep unless so minded. If a good tall fellow is lopped down here and there,—like the worthy Gascon whom Dunois strikes through the unvisored face—the tragedy comes before

we have known the man long enough to grow greatly interested in him. We are only affected as by the death of a very casual acquaintance.[1] And such sufferers as the Wild Boar of the Ardennes deserve their fate too thoroughly to cause us the most passing pang. So does Scott, in his genial kindliness, temper for us the horrors of the Middle Ages. He does not blink them, as M. Taine erroneously seems to hold. He presents them, with consummate art, so that they shall not cause unnecessary pain. Victor Hugo, in "Nôtre Dame," was animated by a quite other spirit. After the manner of his nation—for French fiction tolerates an amount of unmerited misery to which the English reader would never submit—he looks upon life far more gloomily. Claude Frollo may perhaps deserve even the appalling agony of those eternal moments during which he hangs suspended from the leaden gutter at the top of the tower of Nôtre Dame, and has a hideous foretaste of his imminent death. Quasimodo is at best but an animal with a turn for bell-ringing, and, apart from his deformity and deafness, not entitled to much sympathy. But Esmeralda, poor Esmeralda, who through the deep mire of her surroundings has kept a soul so maidenly and pure, who is 'full of tender pity for all suffering, and possesses a heart that beats with such true woman's love—what had she done that Victor Hugo should bestow the treasure of that love upon the worthless archer-coxcomb, Phœbus de Chateaupers, that he should make her frail harmless pretty life, a life of torture, and cause her to die literally in the hangman's grasp? Was it worth while that

[1] The murder of the Bishop of Liège is, I admit, an exception.

Esmeralda's mother, Paquerette la Chantefleurie, should find her child again, after long years of anguish, only to relinquish her, after one brief moment of rapture, for that terrible end? Quentin's courage and practical sagacity are crowned with success: he saves the woman he loves. But by what irony of fate does it happen that Quasimodo's heroic efforts to defend Esmeralda have for only result to injure those who are trying to save her, and the hastening of her doom?

Gloom, gloom, a horror of darkness and evil deeds, of human ineptitude and wrong, such is the background of "Nôtre Dame." If Scott gives us a poetry of sunshine and high emprise, Victor Hugo gives us, and here with a more than equal puissance, the poetry of cloud-wrack and ungovernable passion. There is no piece of character-painting in "Quentin Durward" that, for tragic lurid power and insight, can be placed beside the portrait of Claude Frollo.[1] Lucid and animated as are such scenes as the sacking of the bishop's palace, and the attack on Liège, they are not executed with such striking effects of light and shade as the companion scene in "Nôtre Dame," the attack of the beggars on the cathedral. Scott's landscape is bright, pleasant, the reflection of a world seen by a healthy imagination and clear in the sunlight of a particularly sane nature. Victor Hugo's world in "Nôtre Dame" is as a world seen in fever-vision, or suddenly illumined by great flashes of lightning. The mediæval city is before us

[1] Brian de Bois Guilbert is the corresponding character in Scott, —a character equally passionate, but not, I think, analysed so powerfully.

in all its picturesque huddle of irregular buildings. We are in it; we see it: the narrow streets with their glooms and gleams, their Rembrandt effects of shadow and light; the quaint overhanging houses each of which seems to have a face of its own; the churches and convents flinging up to the sky their towers and spires; and high above all, the city's very soul, the majestic cathedral. And what a motley medley of human creatures throng the place! Here is the great guild of beggar-thieves even more tatterdemalion and shamelessly grotesque than when Callot painted them for us two centuries later. Here is Gringoire, the out-at-elbows unsuccessful rhymer of the time. Anon Esmeralda passes accompanied by her goat. She lays down her little mat, and dances lightly, gracefully to her tambourine. See how the gossips whisper of witchcraft as the goat plays its pretty tricks. And who is that grave priest, lean from the long vigils of study, who stands watching the girl's every motion with an eye of sombre flame? Close behind, in attendance on the priest, is a figure scarcely human, deformed, hideous, having but one Cyclops eye—also fastened on the girl. Among the bystanders may be seen the priest's brother, Jehan, the Paris student of the town-sparrow type that has existed from the days of Villon even until now. Before the dancer has collected her spare harvest of small coins, a soldier troop rides roughly by, hustling the crowd, and in the captain the poor child recognises the man who has saved her from violence some days before—the man to whom, alas, she has given her heart. In such a group as this what elements of tragedy lie

lurking and ready to out-leap? That priest in his guilty passion will foreswear his priestly vows, stab the soldier, and, failing to compass his guilty ends, give over the poor child-dancer to torture and death. The deformed Cyclops, seeing the priest's fiendish laughter as they both stand on the top of Nôtre Dame tower, watching the girl's execution, will guess that *he* is the cause of her doom, and hurl him over the parapet. And the student too will be entangled in the tragic chains by which these human creatures are bound together. His shattered carcase will lie hanging from one of the sculptured ornaments on the front of the Cathedral.

Living, living,—yes, the book is unmistakably palpitatingly alive. It does not live, perhaps, with the life of prose and every-day experience. But it lives the better life of imagination. The novelist, by force of genius, compels our acceptance of the world he has created. Esmeralda, like Oliver Twist, and even more than Oliver Twist, is an improbable, almost impossible being. No one, we conceive, writing nowadays, with Darwinism in the air, would venture to disregard the laws of inherited tendency so far as to evoke such a character from the cloud-land of fancy. If he did, Mr. Francis Galton would laugh him to scorn. The girl's mother—one does not want to press heavily upon the poor creature, and it must therefore suffice to say that she was far from being a model to her sex. The father was anybody you like. From such parentage of vice and chance what superior virtue was to be expected? And, failing birth-gifts, had there been anything in education or surroundings to account for so

dainty a product? Far from it. The girl from her infancy had been dragged through the ditches that lie along the broad highway of life, and is dwelling, when we came across her, in one of the foulest dens of the foul old city. She is almost as impossible as Eugène Sue's *Fleur de Marie* in the "Mysteries of Paris." And yet, impossible as she may be, we still believe in her. She is a real person in a real world. That Paris of gloom and gleam may never have existed in history exactly as Victor Hugo paints it for us. It exists for all time notwithstanding. And Claude Frollo exists too, and Jehan, and Gringoire, and Coppenole, the jolly Flemish burgher, and Phœbus, and the beggars,—all the personages of this old-world drama. I should myself as soon think of doubting the truth of the pitiful story told by Damoiselle Mahiette, of how poor Paquerette loved and lost her little child, as I should think of doubting that Portia did, in actual fact, visit Venice, disguised as a learned judge from Padua, and, after escaping her husband's recognition, confound Shylock by her superior interpretation of the law.

In the "Orientales" and "Hernani," Victor Hugo had shown himself a magnificent artist in verse. In "Nôtre Dame de Paris," he showed himself a magnificent artist in prose. The writing throughout is superb. Scene after scene is depicted with a graphic force of language, a power, as it were, of concentrating and flashing light, that are beyond praise. Some of the word-pictures are indelibly bitten into the memory as when an etcher has bitten into copper with his acid. Henceforward there could be no question as to the place which the author

of the three works just named was entitled to take in the world of literature. Byron was dead, and Scott dying. Chateaubriand had ceased to be a living producing force. Goethe's long day of life was drawing to its serene close. Failing these, Victor Hugo stepped into the first place in European literature, and that place he occupied till his death.[1]

And what light did Olympian Goethe, the star that was setting, throw upon "Nôtre Dame de Paris"? A light not altogether benignant, nor, if one may venture to say so in all humility and reverence, altogether just.

> "Victor Hugo has a fine talent," he said in one of his conversations with Eckermann, "but he is imbued with the disastrous romantic tendencies of his time. This is why he is led astray, and places beside what is beautiful that which is most unbearable and hideous. I have been reading 'Nôtre Dame de Paris' these last few days, and it required no small dose of patience to endure the torments which that perusal cost me. It is the most detestable book ever written. . . . What shall we think of a time that not only produces such books, but enjoys them?"

Whereupon one sighs to think that even the gods sitting on Olympus are in some slight sort subject to the infirmities of age, and lose the power of looking with an equally large equity upon the present and future, as well as upon the past.

[1] I am not here, of course, arguing any question as to the relative greatness of Byron as compared with Wordsworth or Coleridge, who were then still alive. But neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge had, like Byron, a European name.

## CHAPTER VII.

WITH the year 1831, and the publication of "Nôtre Dame de Paris," we have reached, as it were, a high tableland in the career of Victor Hugo. He has achieved the most honourable, one may even say the most splendid distinction. He possesses a band of enthusiastic admirers and disciples. If his fame is still contested, it is with such clamour as in itself implies homage, for none but the very great excite in their opponents that kind of anger. He is happy in his children, Léopoldine, Charles, François Victor. He is still young, moreover, not yet thirty, in the first full flower of his manhood. As we scan the portrait, somewhat idealized, perhaps, that Théophile Gautier has left of him at this time, we certainly see a man well dowered with life's best gifts.

"What most struck one at first sight in Victor Hugo was a truly monumental brow that rose like a white marble entablature over his quietly earnest face. . . . The beauty and vastness of that forehead were in truth well-nigh superhuman. It seemed to afford room for the greatest thoughts. Crowns of gold or laurel would fitly have found a place there, as on the brow of a Cæsar or a god. . . . It was set in a frame of light, long, auburn hair. But though the hair was somewhat long, the poet wore neither beard, moustachios, whiskers, nor imperial, the face being most carefully shaven, and of a particular kind of paleness, burnt through, as it

were, and illumined by two eyes of bronze-gold, like the eyes of an eagle. The drawing of the mouth was firm and decided, with lips curved and bent down at the corners, lips that, when parted by a smile, displayed teeth of dazzling whiteness. His dress consisted of a black frock coat, grey trousers, a little turned-down collar,—a 'get-up' of absolute respectability and correctness. No one would have suspected that this perfect gentleman could be the chief of those bearded and dishevelled hordes who were the terror of the smooth-chinned citizen. Such Victor Hugo appeared to us when first we met; and the image has never faded from our memory. We cherish with pious care that portrait of him as he was, young, handsome, smiling, radiant with genius, and shedding round him a sort of phosphorescence of glory."

Surely the man of whom such a portrait could at all truthfully be drawn ought not to have found the waters of life bitter. Surely he can have had no quarrel with fate. And yet, by a strange irony, the volume of poems which Victor Hugo published in the latter part of this same year, 1831, bears the sad-sounding title of "Feuilles d'Automne" ("Autumn Leaves"), and is, in its pervading tone, melancholy with the rustle of dead hopes. Yes, even at thirty, youth and so many of its illusions had flown—even to this pre-eminently successful man success seemed to mean so little. So he sings of his sorrows in delightful verse, sings of the child that he had once been, and in whose presence the man that he now is "almost blushes"—sings of that child's earliest memories, his mother's love, his boyish aspirations, his glimpses of the great Napoleon—sings a dirge over the "best time of life flown without hope of return." And mingled with all this "pathetic minor," come some few love-verses—for what poet, however tearful, ever forbore for any long time to sound love's tremulous string? and verses also

that seem set to the music of children's voices and laughter. Here the poet was striking a congenial chord, and with a master's hand. What child-poetry will compare with his? As in the days of old, "out of the strong came forth sweetness," so from this poet of storm and battle, this cloud-compeller, whose words often boom and reverberate like thunder, so from him, when childhood was his theme, have come some of the gentlest, most graceful, most delicate, most tender of human words. He never seems to think of the little folk without a mental caress. His thought smiles to them. His fancy seems to make itself a child in their company. His sympathies are keenly wrung by their sorrows. "Le livre des Mères"[1] (the "Mother's book"), such has been the title given to a selection from his poems on childhood and infancy, and no title could be more appropriate. Throughout his life, in his extreme age as in his early manhood, he loved the little ones with almost a mother's heart.

If one comes to ask why at this particular moment in Victor Hugo's career, and even for some time afterwards, the prevailing tone in his verse should have been a tone of sadness and disenchantment, the reply can only be given vaguely, and as a matter of guess work. There may have been nothing more in the feeling which here finds expression than the melancholy often accompanying the first approach of middle age. Youth's battle is over; success has been achieved, the heights breasted and won; and now, when the ardour of onset has cooled, the result seems poor and unprofitable—the tableland of life, bleak, barren, and cold. Was it

[1] "Les Enfants, le livre des Mères."

worth while storming the ascent for this? Could but youth and its illusions, and the old delight of battle, come back once more! Such, consciously or unconsciously, may have been the state of Victor Hugo's mind at this period. Whether he had other causes of sadness, self-dissatisfaction, or what not, is unrevealed. On this, as on many other questions relating to his real inner life, we are much in the dark. There are few men whose inmost nature it is more difficult to reach. In inaccessibility, as in so many other things, he bears no small resemblance to a king. Even his verse, like the state and pageantry surrounding a monarch, seems in one sense rather to hide than really to reveal him. No doubt the feelings and thoughts to which it gives expression are for the most part genuine. The poet had had such feelings and thoughts. But in showing them to the world, in clothing them in their art dress, they necessarily underwent a transformation into "something rich and strange," or at any rate something not quite the same. What was the real actual Hugo behind them? This it is very far from easy always to discover. Possibly, as time goes on, the publication of his correspondence will throw light on some obscure points. Meanwhile it must remain to some extent a problem, that the man who was afterwards to front with undaunted serenity, exile, old age, the death of those he most loved, should now, amid the full leafage of his June, have faltered and talked of autumn and its falling leaves. In the tremendous trials, public and private, of his later life, he "bated no jot of heart or hope," but "still kept up and steered right onward," thereby giving to mankind

an example of fortitude and high courage. Why do the volumes of verse dated respectively 1831 and 1835 bear titles so suggestive of sadness as "Autumn Leaves," and "Songs of the Twilight"?

Of the succession of plays produced in the middle period of Victor Hugo's career, I have already spoken; nor need I criticise them again here, and linger over the incidents attendant on their production, and the lawsuits to which they gave rise. The only real importance of the latter in the poet's career is the evidence they afforded of his power as an orator, for he spoke in his own defence, and spoke well,—whereof, as Carlyle would have said, might come much.

Of his prose it is necessary to speak at greater length. Considering what a brilliant success he had achieved with "Nôtre Dame," one cannot but wonder, even when all explanations have been given, that he did not almost immediately turn to fiction again, instead of resolutely putting it to one side for thirty long years. His first prose-work after "Nôtre Dame" was entitled "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées" ("Literature and Philosophy Commingled"), and appeared in the early part of 1834. There is a preface, of course. Victor Hugo, in the good old days, never sent out a book on its embassage without a herald-preface, duly attired in the cloth-of-gold and brocade of rhetoric, to announce its qualities and purpose. So here he explains why he has unearthed from the *Conservateur Littéraire*, which he does not name by-the-by, the articles that had slumbered there since 1819, and placed them in juxtaposition with the jottings of 1830 and various papers of later date,

and, notably, one on Mirabeau, written in 1834. A conscientious desire to study the development of his own mind has been the determinant cause. *That* was the point from which he started. *This* is the point he has reached. And every stage of the progress, as he declares—protesting therein perhaps a little too much—has been presided over by "uprightness, honour, a real conviction, and disinterestedness." Of the somewhat miscellaneous contents of the book, the paper on Mirabeau is decidedly the finest and most striking. It may be read advantageously with what Carlyle has written on the same subject.

To this same year, 1834, belongs a powerful apologue entitled "Claude Gueux," which appeared in the *Revue de Paris*. It is the story of a workman, not over-idealized but with fine elements in his character, who, acting judiciously according to his lights, kills the governor of the prison in which he is confined. Moralizing whereon, the author proceeds to plead eloquently the cause of the poor and ignorant, the cause of education, and, what seems strange, yet shows the state of Victor Hugo's opinions at this time, the cause of religion and the gospel. "Sow the villages with the gospel!" he cries. "Let there be a Bible in every hut!" "Jesus had better lore to teach than Voltaire."

Next in order of publication comes a voluminous work issued in the beginning of 1842,[1] and entitled "Le Rhin" ("The Rhine"). It purports to consist of a series of letters written to a friend in Paris, and giving a traveller's experiences amid the beauties

[1] Greatly added to in later editions.

and picturesquenesses of the glorious old Rhineland. Here, as in the volume entitled "Choses Vues" ("Things Seen"), which has appeared within the last few months, the author shows himself, for the most part, without his prophet's robe, and describes simply what happened simply, and graphicly what lent itself to imaginative picturing. On the perfect accuracy of the erudition displayed, I will offer no opinion. I am willing to take it on trust. But no special trustfulness is required to accept for truth the "Legend of the Handsome Pécopin and the Beautiful Bauldour," and their sad separation of a hundred years. "Dull would he be of soul" who refused to accompany the poet into the "fairyland forlorn" of their sorrows, and to follow the superb tramplings and hurryings of Pécopin's wild ride through the enchanted forest.

Contemporaneously with these volumes of prose, Victor Hugo published three volumes of verse: "Les Chants du Crépuscule" ("Songs of the Twilight"), issued in 1835; "Les Voix Intérieures" ("Voices Within"), in 1837; and "Les Rayons et les Ombres" ("The Rays and the Shadows"), in 1840.

These volumes are full of good things, but how shall I characterize them? How try to photograph into poor prose the evanescences of a great singer's verse? We have here again memories of the poet's childhood, of "what took place at the Feuillantines in 1813." We have recollections of former events in his career, of his interview with Charles X. on the 7th of August, 1829, when the performance of "Marion de Lorme" was in question. We have hymns of praise and thanksgiving

over the Revolution of 1830; and also, in more than one piece, strains drear and melancholy with the recurring troubles and uncertainties of the time. Napoleon comes in for a good deal of adulation; for are we not in the days just anterior to the bringing back of the great dead from St. Helena, and his second interment beneath the dome of the Invalides? And the contrast between the condition of the rich and the poor is vigorously shown. One piece of invective, against the man who had betrayed the Duchesse de Berry, foreshadows the tremendous denunciations of the Second Empire in the "Châtiments." Love poems, too, again we have, and some few songs. And throughout, if the general tone no longer possesses the gladness of youth, yet has it distinctly less of the melancholy of age than in the "Feuilles d'Automne." "Olympio"—for under that name the poet seems here to idealize himself—Olympio is attacked, mis-said, reviled; storms gloom, and lightnings flicker and flash round him, as they did of old round the hoar mount whose name he has borrowed; and in his less prophetic and more human character he visits again the places hallowed by the memories of love, and mourns in memorable verse, as Lamartine had mourned before, as nearly all poets have mourned, over the mutability of things and nature's impassiveness. But, after all, Olympio is not uncomforted. He looks from this lower world to the world which is invisible, and determines to keep his soul's tranquillity unruffled, as a mountain keeps eternal and unmoved its coronet of snow. At which the reader may perhaps feel a little inclined to smile. But if he does he should balk the wish. For, in point of fact, life's

storms beat their hardest round Olympio's head, and he did bear it above the clouds to the end. That there was a strong element of theatricality in his nature cannot be denied. Are we not told that Shakespeare himself had killed beeves "with a flourish"? But behind the theatricality was a man, and a great man.

And now he was aspiring to be a member of the Academy, which somewhat fluttered the thirty-nine immortals "seated," as Mr. Browning irreverently puts it, "by gout and glory," in their thirty-nine arm-chairs. Of course, looking at his genius and literary position, he ought to have been elected at once, and without demur. But academies are conservative, and by their very nature seldom march in the van of any literary or artistic movement. So he knocked at the door thrice before he gained admittance; was rejected in 1836 in favour of a M. Dupaty, who has left no great name of any kind; was rejected in 1839 in favour of M. Molé, whose name, or so much of it as remains, is philosophico-political rather than literary; was rejected in 1840 in favour of a scientific M. Flourens; and, finally, was elected in 1841.

Certain persons there were at the time, and Alexandre Dumas and Alphonse Karr were among them, who blamed the poet for wishing to be an Academician; and Mr. Cappon, in his recent clever book on Victor Hugo, echoes the thought, and asks, "if a green border on his vestment, and a *fauteuil*, even in that weighty assembly, could add any real distinction to the author of 'Hernani' and the 'Voix Intérieures'"? Perhaps not; and yet the feeling that here finds utterance seems to me, I confess, somewhat overstrained. Doubtless very great men: Balzac,

André Chénier, Rousseau, Pascal, Molière, Beaumarchais, Dumas himself, have sat in that forty-first arm-chair of which M. Arsène Houssaye has wittily written the history—that imaginary forty-first arm-chair which has been occupied by those who ought to have belonged to the Academy, and yet never found admittance there. But the forty-first arm-chair is one only, and the others are forty, and, strength for strength, the forty are stronger than the one. The French Academy is a body that no writer, however great, can afford to despise. Nor, looking at the matter in a larger, less personal aspect, is it fitting that a writer who is really great, should arrogantly refuse to contribute his share of lustre to a body so linked with all the nation's past. Therefore it seems to me that Madame Hugo's apology for her husband is scarcely needed. He wished to take an active part in politics, she tells us ; and to do this a peerage was necessary, and to be eligible for a peerage he must be an Academician. Hence his candidature.

Be it so. But Madame de Girardin, who, under the pseudonym of Vicomte de Launay, acted as the chronicler of the time, has left an account of his reception on the 3rd of June, 1841, and tells us that he by no means seemed to regard the ceremony as a thing of naught, and took his position as an Academician very seriously. She tells us, too, how it had been expected that he would, in his speech, riddle with sarcasm his "classical" opponents. But those who anticipated mischief were disappointed. Victor Hugo's address soared out of petty personal regions, dealt largely with Napoleon, whose praise was, for the nonce on everybody's tongue, and

somewhat, generally, with the high mission of the thinker and the writer. Nor did the same amenity fail him on the two subsequent occasions when it fell to his lot to speak at the Academy. On the 16th of January, and again on the 27th of February, 1845, he had to reply to the reception speeches of Saint-Marc Girardin and Sainte-Beuve. With neither writer can he have been in any sympathy. Girardin, in his lectures on dramatic art, had spoken of Victor Hugo's works with perfect courtesy,—for when did a discourteous word proceed from those refined and Attic lips?—but still critically and without enthusiasm, and was essentially a classic; while with Sainte-Beuve, Victor Hugo was now on that curious footing of reticent hostility which each maintained towards the other to the end. But, in addressing both, his words were those of entire good taste; and his critical account of Sainte-Beuve's works was more than just; it was generous and kindly.

And did the Academy prove a stepping-stone to the peerage as Victor Hugo had hoped? Most certainly it did. With Louis Philippe he had for some time been on the best terms. His unique literary position more than justified his elevation. There was nothing in his views, as expressed so far, to make it probable that he would be a factious opponent to Guizot's Ministry, by which the King's Government was then conducted, or to the Government itself. And accordingly, on the 13th of April, 1845, he was made a peer. But of his doings in that capacity, and of his politics generally, I purpose to speak in another chapter.

Before doing so, however, it may be as well to say a

few words about the poet's residence in the Place Royale, which he occupied from the autumn of 1832 till nearly the time when the *Coup d'État* drove him from Paris.[1] The house, we are told, I don't know how truly, had long, long years before been occupied by Marion de Lorme. It has been several times described. I quote M. Barbou's description, rather than M. de Banville's, because, though less poetical, it is perhaps more precise.

"The suite of apartments," he says, "was on the second floor, and approached by a wide and handsome staircase. A door opened into the dining-room, which was adorned with some fine tapestry, representing scenes in the 'Romaunt of the Rose.' . . . The study was a room full of quaint pieces of furniture, and overlooking an inner courtyard. The ceiling was decorated with a painting by Auguste de Châtillon, called Le Moine Rouge, 'the red monk,' a strange production, . . . its subject being a priest robed in red, lying at full length, and reading a Bible held up by a nude female figure. . . . The *salon* might almost be described as a picture gallery, so numerous were the artists . . . who had sought the honour of being allowed to contribute to its decoration. At one end was a high mantelpiece, fashioned according to the poet's taste, covered with drapery, and supporting some fine china vases. On the left was a sort of daïs . . . on which it has been alleged that Victor Hugo, in his vanity, used to sit on a throne, . . . beneath a canopy, and extend his hand to be kissed by his admirers, who would mount the steps upon their knees. . . . Some arm-chairs of the time of Louis XV., made of gilt wood, and covered with tapestry, completed the furniture of the reception room. . . . Opposite the daïs were three large windows reaching to the ground, and opening on to a balcony that ran the whole length of the salon, and overlooked the Square."

The picture is of a luxuriously artistic dwelling, and

[1] The house which he then occupied was in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne. It has been described by Théophile Gautier.

reminds us, in some of the details, of the interior decoration of Hauteville House, Guernsey, where the poet's taste in such matters was hereafter to find such full expression. The story of the daïs and canopy, and the semi-religious function connected therewith, we might, I think, at once laugh away, even without M. Barbou's indignant disclaimer. Victor Hugo was, no doubt, inclined to pontificate on public occasions, and, in later years, spoke only too often *urbi et orbi*, to the city of Paris and to the world. But in private life, all evidence goes to prove that he was pleasant, genial, simple, a charming host, and fulfilled with an old-world charm of manner and courtliness. Forster, for instance, tells us with what "infinite courtesy and grace" he received Dickens and himself; and after descanting on the "noble corner house," the "gorgeous tapestries, the painted ceilings, the wonderful carvings, and old golden furniture," goes on to say:

"He was himself, however, the best thing we saw; and I find it difficult to associate the attitudes and aspect in which the world has lately wondered at him, with the sober grace and self-possessed quiet gravity of that night of twenty-five years ago. Just then Louis Philippe had ennobled him, but the man's nature was written noble. Rather under the middle size, of compact close-buttoned-up figure, with ample dark hair falling loosely over his close-shaven face, I never saw upon features so keenly intellectual such a soft and sweet geniality, and certainly never heard the French language spoken with the picturesque distinctness given to it by Victor Hugo. He talked of his childhood in Spain, and of his father having been governor of the Tagus in Napoleon's wars; spoke warmly of the English people and their literature; declared his preference for melody and simplicity over the music then fashionable at the Con-

servatoire ;[1] referred kindly to Ponsard,[2] laughed at the actors who had murdered his (Ponsard's) tragedy at the Odéon, and sympathized with the dramatic venture of Dumas. To Dickens he addressed very charming flattery in the best taste ; and my friend long remembered the enjoyment of that evening."

But all testimony is to the same effect. M. Legouvé, the Academician, having to describe an interview with the great man, says, "he showed himself, on this occasion, what in private life he invariably was, unaffected, amusing, full of anecdote and pleasantry." M. Lesclide, his private secretary in later years, speaks to similar effect, and insists on "the charm of his conversation, which was easy, simple, yet full of colour, and, when he was animated, of an ardent enthusiasm." M. de Banville, who mentions the throne-and-daïs story as an invention of the small paragraphists of the press, says he "had indeed other tigers to comb"—a dignified foreign equivalent for "other fish to fry,"—than

"to play at royalty. He was then, as we have ever seen him, affable, full of welcome, thinking of every one, forgetful of himself, and retaining no trace of his aristocratic breeding save an exquisite politeness and familiar courtesy. When in his house, you felt at home, free, happy, at ease, and warmed by a pleasant atmosphere of affection and tenderness. It was hospitality of the real right kind—that which you will find in a king's palace, and a woodcutter's hut."

Nor would it be right to forget the part which Madame Hugo contributed to the charm of this delightful hospitality. M. de Banville not only speaks enthusiastically

[1] Like many great verbal melodists, he had no ear or real liking for music.

[2] Whom the classical party had set up as his rival.

of her dark beauty, calling her "the Muse of Romanticism," but also speaks of "the sovereign grace" with which she "did the honours" of her salon, and helped to make it a place where "all the men of that time who had achieved fame" delighted to congregate.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE Revolution of July, 1830, which drove Charles X. from the throne of France, was a mistake, but an excusable mistake. The Revolution of February, 1848, which cut short the reign of Louis Philippe, was a mistake without an excuse. No doubt the Citizen King's government had committed errors, as what government has not? The suffrage was too restricted, the number of place-men in Parliament excessive. And that Guizot, the minister who in himself personified the policy of the last years of the reign, thought overmuch of the opinion of the Chambers, and over little of the opinion of the country, cannot be denied. But such reasons, however valid for the overturning of a ministry, were certainly not adequate reasons for upsetting a government, and casting a great nation adrift to the chances of revolution, anarchy, and imperialism.

Nor does it seem that at the time Victor Hugo would have repudiated this view. In order, however, to understand the part he took in politics during the stormy days from 1848 to 1851, it is necessary to go back, and to follow the course of his opinions from an earlier date.

Long years before, when he and the Government of the Restoration were young together, he had been an ardent royalist. His royalism, no doubt, cooled a good deal before the great three days of July, 1830, which sent Charles X. into exile; but still there is no strong evidence anywhere, that up to that time he went very fiercely into opposition. Madame Hugo makes much of the "Ode à la Colonne" (the "Ode to the Column"), published in 1827, under the following circumstances. The Austrian ambassador had asked a certain number of French marshals to an entertainment;—they came, and were announced with their names shorn of the titles won in battle against the Austrian arms. Whereupon they withdrew. And Victor Hugo, a few days afterwards, published his fine ode, all quivering with patriotic indignation. But such an act need not at all necessarily have been an act of declared opposition. M. Biré shows almost conclusively that it was not; and that the king, on this occasion, shared the sentiments of the poet. The fact is, that with the death of Napoleon, imperialism had ceased for a time to be a practical factor in French politics, and that Victor Hugo might declare himself, in sonorous verse, to be the Memnon tuneful in the rays of the Imperial sun, without greatly hurting anybody's susceptibilities. The admiration was felt to be poetical only. When, therefore, he claimed in the preface to "Marion de Lorme," dated August, 1831, to have "been for many years in the most laborious, if not the most illustrious, ranks of the opposition," he seems clearly to have been deceiving himself. His royalism had certainly undergone a change

since he wrote about the Virgins of Verdun, and La Vendée, and the consecration of Charles X. But he had drawn his pension regularly, and spoken of the king with politeness, if not enthusiasm. The evidence, in short, of his long years of patient labour for the overthrow of the government is wanting.

After the Revolution of 1830 his opinions took an added tinge of liberalism. He marched with the times. In the preface to "Marion de Lorme" that Revolution is characterized as "admirable." In the preface to "Le Roi s'amuse," dated November, 1832, we are told that "in July, 1830," "France had done three good days' work, had advanced three great stages along the road of civilization and progress." The "Feuilles d'Automne" contains a poem in favour of the "oppressed nationalities,"— "Greece, our disembowelled mother," and "bleeding Ireland, dying upon her cross," and "Germany in chains, struggling against ten kings," and Poland "dead and dishevelled, violated by a hideous Cossack." A portion of the "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées" is entitled a "Journal of the Ideas and Opinions of a Revolutionist of 1830," and opens with this declaration: "What we require after July, 1830, is a republic in fact, and a monarchy in word."

This last quotation may fairly be accepted as representing the attitude of Victor Hugo's mind from 1830 to 1848; and that attitude may still further be illustrated by another quotation from the same journal.

"The republic, in the view of some persons, is the warfare of those who possess neither a halfpenny, nor an idea, nor a single virtue, against whomsoever possesses any one of these three things. The

republic, as I understand it—that republic which is not yet ripe, but which will embrace the whole of Europe a century hence—is society entirely self-governed: self-protected through the national guard; self-judged through the jury; self-administered through the municipality; self-directed throught the suffrage. In that republic the four members of the monarchy—the army, the magistracy, the administrative organization, the peerage, are only four inconvenient excrescences which will gradually wither and soon die."

Thus Victor Hugo was at this time what we should now call an "opportunist." He looked forward in the future to certain political and social changes. But meanwhile he had no desire to hurry matters—rather thought, on the contrary, that undue haste would cause accidents and delay—and was quite content to make the best use possible of existing institutions. Thus, for instance, though the peerage might prove in 1930 or thereabouts to be "an inconvenient excrescence," there was no reason why he should not, while that consummation was still remote, be a peer, and a useful peer—exercising his judicial functions reasonably and well, as it seems he did—and making speeches on copyright, on Poland, on the defence of the coast, on the readmission of the Bonaparte family into France, and on the aspirations of Pope Pius IX. towards a united Italy.

A republican in theory, a monarchist in practice, a liberal in his acceptance of the sonorous watchwords of liberalism, a conservative in his conviction that great immediate political changes would be an unmixed evil, a poet in his sympathy for the poor and down-trodden, a practical man in his appreciation of the fact that any bettering of the condition of the masses must be a work of time and patience—such was Victor Hugo when the

Revolution of February, 1848, broke suddenly upon constitutional monarchy in France.

That it came on him, at first, as a blow, seems unquestionable;—and all honour to the feeling, the blow was a blow to France. On the 24th of February, the king weakly abdicated rather than cause any effusion of blood; and the widowed Duchess of Orleans, with her two children, the Comte de Paris and the Duc de Chartres, went to the Chambers to see if it were yet possible to save the crown for the elder. It was a brave, a desperate expedient, and might perchance have been successful, so did the woman's sorrows and gallant bearing impress the Assembly, had not Lamartine, the poet, thrown the weight of his popularity and eloquence into the adverse scale. Victor Hugo at that time favoured the appointment of the Duchess as Regent, and vainly proclaimed her rights on the Place de la Bastille. When it became clear that the monarchy was gone, he hesitated for some time as to his future political course. In the month of April he was put forward as a candidate to represent Paris in the "Assemblée Constituante," which was to be called together for the purpose of framing a constitution. But his name only came out forty-eighth on the list,—Lamartine's being first,—and he was unsuccessful. On the 4th of June, however, a supplementary election proved more propitious. 86,965 votes were recorded in his favour, and he entered the Assembly. Among those elected with him was Louis Napoleon, then living as a very unattached prince in England.

Victor Hugo's address to the electors fairly represents

the attitude he was to hold in the Assembly. There were two republics in possibility, he declared— one that would run up the red flag, erect a statue to Marat, make half-pence out of Napoleon's column, abolish property, destroy family ties, parade guillotined heads on the top of pikes,—and, in short, exhibit the ghastly phantasmagoria of 1793, which Victor Hugo was afterwards to regard with so much complacency. The other republic, on the contrary, was really to be a very respectable and quiet affair, and to inaugurate a reign of peace, plenty, and brotherhood. It will thus be seen that the poet at this time spake the words of sobriety and wisdom. His sympathy for the poorer classes was, as it had always been, ardent and openly expressed. But he would have nothing to say to national workshops and other quack remedies for their troubles. No doubt he had crotchets of his own, such as the abolition of capital punishment; but they were harmless and even beneficent crotchets when compared with the wild theories thrown hither and thither like Greek fire in that assembly of all the eccentricities. At no period of his subsequent life did he show the same sanity and equipoise of political judgment, as when sitting in the Constituent Assembly as a conservative republican.

A very short experience served to sicken France of the democratic government inaugurated in February, 1848. The constitution—a thoroughly bad one—framed by the Constituent Assembly, provided for the election of a president by universal suffrage. That election took place on the 10th of December, with this result—that Lamartine, who had started in the previous February with

unbounded popularity, and had really rendered great services to France, was nowhere; that General Cavaignac, who represented moderate republicanism, only secured 1,448,107 votes, and that Louis Napoleon headed the poll with 5,434,226 votes.

And what did Louis Napoleon represent? Personally he represented a past that was simply ridiculous—a farcical landing at Boulogne with a tame eagle, a temporary imprisonment in a bathing machine, a hopelessly abortive attempt at Strasburg to incite a regiment to mutiny. But, of course, his name represented something essentially different, it represented a past to which Frenchmen of nearly all shades looked back as one of glory—a past in which revolutionary passion had been curbed by a strong, firm hand. And then that name had been so superbly advertised! Think how the Napoleonic legend had been preached to the people, and by what effectual tongues. Béranger, the most popular poet of his day, had given it a voice through the length and breadth of the land. Thiers had devoted to its proclamation the beautiful lucidity of his prose. Victor Hugo had sung it again and yet again in impassioned verse. Not nine years before, the body of the great emperor had been borne through the streets of Paris, with all outward signs of a nation's mourning, and the country had re-echoed with the dead man's fame. And now, when the time was ripe, the nephew appeared transfigured by the uncle's glory. Every one, the most illiterate voter, knew Louis Napoleon's name; and in such a case to be known is everything. He was simply by far the best advertised among the candidates.

Victor Hugo has described, in the opening of his scathing book, "Napoléon le Petit" ("Napoleon the Little"), how in the gathering darkness of a winter afternoon, on the 20th of December, 1848, Louis Napoleon ascended the tribune of the Assembly, and swore in "the presence of God, and before the French people, to remain faithful to the democratic Republic one and indivisible, and to fulfil all the duties imposed on him by the Constitution."

To what extent did the Prince President mean to keep that oath? Who shall tell? The man was a mystic, a visionary, a fatalist, and in his strangely compounded intellect had probably a kind of belief in some personal mission of his own that absolved him from the petty trammels of honour. That the "democratic Republic" was in evil case even at that time is clear; and also that the "Constitution" was pretty nearly unworkable anyhow, and absolutely unworkable when subjected to the strain and jars of disloyalty. Victor Hugo, in his polemics, lays all the blame for subsequent events on Louis Napoleon's turpitude, on his intrigues for the consolidation of his own power, his constant attempts to discredit parliamentary government, his settled determination by all means to reach the Empire. But there is, of course, a different side to all this. If the advanced radical party, to which Victor Hugo was so soon to belong, had not thoroughly frightened France, imperialism would have been impossible. The wild talk of the revolutionists, frothy with the froth of blood, the horrors of the insurrection of June, 1848, the martyrdom of the Archbishop of Paris, shot down as he strove to put an end to a fratricidal war—such were the arguments that told so heavily in

Louis Napoleon's favour. He was borne to his evil goal by the faults of his enemies. Of course he took advantage of their faults. It was by playing on the fears which they excited that he secured the co-operation of statesmen of the highest character and intellect, who would, in calmer times, have been the first to oppose his designs.

Meanwhile, what part was Victor Hugo taking in public affairs? At first he favoured Louis Napoleon. They had both been elected to the Constituent Assembly at the same time, and when the question was debated whether the Prince, then still in London, should be admitted into France to take his seat, Victor Hugo voted in his favour. He also supported his candidature for the Presidency. At the same time, he was speaking and voting as a conservative republican, and on the 29th of January, 1849, we find him opposing the radical party who objected to the dissolution of the Assembly.

But in May, when the dissolution took place, and a new Assembly, the Assemblée Législative—far more conservative than the old—came into existence, Victor Hugo's attitude changed altogether. He had again been elected by the City of Paris, and now took up openly the position of extreme radicalism from which he never afterwards retreated. What had led to this change of front? We are not able to answer the question with any degree of precision. Victor Hugo himself, in one of his pompous later prefaces, tells us that—

"After June, 1849, the lightning flash that leaps out of events entered into the author's mind. That kind of flash is indelible. A flash of lightning that remains permanent—such is the light of truth in the human conscience. In 1849 that light shone definitely for

him. When he saw Rome trodden down in the name of France; when he saw the majority, hypocritical so far, suddenly throw away the mask behind which it had, on the 4th of May, 1848, cried seventeen times, 'Long live the Republic!' when he saw, after the 13th of June, the triumph of all the coalitions hostile to progress; when he saw that cynical joy, sadness filled his heart; he understood; and at the moment when the hands of the conquerors were held out to draw him into their ranks, he felt in the bottom of his soul that he too was one of the conquered. A corpse lay on the ground, and all cried, 'Lo, the Republic lies there!' He went and looked at that corpse, and recognized that her name was Liberty. Then he stooped towards her, and took the dead to his bosom as his wife. Before him, as he looked into the future, were overthrow, defeat, ruin, insult, exile, and he said, 'It is well!'"

Not, perhaps, without a certain kind of eloquence all this, but decidedly a little vague; and as the poet does not appear, even at the time, to have condescended to more detailed explanation, one can scarcely wonder that the change in his opinions was regarded with suspicion. As he afterwards said, very characteristically, "I was accused of apostasy when I thought myself an apostle." Veuillot, the acrid Roman Catholic journalist, writing, as usual, with a pen dipped in gall, simply accounted for his conversion by saying that he felt altogether outrivalled among the orators of the more Conservative ranks, and saw that his only chance of securing personal preeminence was among the Radicals. Montalembert, the eloquent Liberal Catholic, in one of their many word-duels, openly cast at the poet a rankling accusation of "having flattered and then denied every cause."

The party polemics of the day one may rightly set to one side. Victor Hugo's attitude during the years 1849, 1850, and 1851 is entirely to be commended in so far

as it was attributable to a clear foresight on his part that Louis Napoleon aimed at a personal despotism. Where he seems to have gone wrong was in thinking that the imperialist designs could best be frustrated by ultra-radical means. By openly allying himself, therefore, to a party whose violence of act and speech formed the future Emperor's stock-in-trade, he simply played into the enemy's hands. That he should speak well and eloquently in his new cause was almost a matter of course. Together with a powerful voice, audible even amid the storms of a popular Assembly, Victor Hugo had all the other parts of an orator—perfect self-possession and confidence, a command of ready and striking language—and language not too delicate in its effects for the speaker's art—and an inborn feeling for form. His passion moved, and his sarcasm went barbed to its mark. That his speeches contained some verbal glitter is undoubtedly true. They seem to crackle every here and there, as one may say, with the tinsel of antithesis. But of their telling brilliancy there can be no question. Whether they are a statesman's speeches is a different matter. Let us take an instance. We have reached the 17th of July, 1851, and a great question is being debated in the Assembly. According to the constitution, Louis Napoleon's tenure of office will expire in 1852; but a revision of the constitution has been proposed. Failing such revision, the Prince President must retire into private life. Will he do so? And, if not, what means will he adopt to remain in power? Now, if ever, it seems desirable to use moderation for the purpose of conjuring the advancing peril, and showing that the

republican party is not really a portent and a bugbear, but capable of right reason and good government. Yet this is the occasion which Victor Hugo selects for an harangue, eloquent indeed, but calculated to give a tongue to every worst accusation brought against the extreme radicals, and to alienate altogether those on whose help the republicans might have counted in any future struggle against the President. He glorifies the Revolution of 1793 as the "era foreseen by Socrates, and for which he drank the hemlock; as the work wrought by Jesus Christ, and for which he was nailed to the cross." He declares the Republic and the Revolution to be indissolubly bound together. He mingles, for common insult and execration, all kinds of monarchy, constitutional as well as unconstitutional. He proposes, as a practical measure, that all judges should be elected by universal suffrage, and the greater political questions decided by direct appeal to the same tribunal. He speaks glibly of the "United States of Europe,"[1] and heralds the "august proclamation of the Rights of Man." In short, he makes a vivacious and telling speech, and plays the game of the ambitious Prince President most effectually. It was speeches of this kind that helped to make the *Coup d'État* possible, and gave Louis Napoleon his immense popular majorities.

But here, amid all this storm of politics, these lightnings of vivid speech and thunderings of revolution, we may fittingly pause once more for the purpose of getting a glimpse of the poet among his family and friends. The

[1] "Really, this is going too far," cried Montalembert when the orator had reached this point, "Hugo is crazy!"

place of meeting is not of happy augury. It is none other than the Conciergerie prison, in which his two sons, and Paul Meurice and Auguste Vacquerie—the whole staff of the *Événement*,[1] Victor Hugo's paper—had been confined for various press delinquencies. But what a merry party they are as M. de Banville drops in upon them! There is the poet himself, who has come to spend the day with the prisoners, and Madame Hugo, and their daughter, Adèle. The young men are "handsome, gay," full of life and spirits, making a jest of their incarceration. The parents are proud to see them in such good heart, and the father caresses their abundant locks. He, too, is "gay, smiling, happy . . . prodigal of winged words, of crystallized sayings, of amusing anecdotes, delightfully familiar, and a thousand times more witty than those who make trade and merchandize of wit." So does the dismal old place ring with their bright talk and laughter, and the day lightly, quickly pass, and fade into the night.

For now the 2nd of December, 1851, is upon us. The *Coup d'État*, however, belongs rather to the general history of France than to my immediate subject, and I need not tell its full story here. We all of us know how, during the fatal night from the 1st to the 2nd, the leading deputies from whom any organized resistance was to be expected, were arrested and lodged in prison; how, on the following day, a proclamation was published declaring the National Assembly dissolved, and appealing to universal suffrage to ratify the President's acts; how

[1] Started on the 1st of April, 1848, with this motto: "Intense hatred of anarchy; tender love for the people."

every printing-press in the capital was gagged; how every attempt at resistance was ruthlessly suppressed; how, in fine, the hand of an iron despotism seized France in its grasp.

Victor Hugo has himself told us the share which he took in resisting the President's usurpation. The news of what had happened in the night reached him at eight o'clock in the morning. He breakfasted hurriedly, kissed his wife and daughter, and sallied forth to meet the other Republican deputies. The meeting took place, and there was some speaking and determination, and then separation in various directions to see if it were possible to induce the people to rise. But from the first it must have been clear that any very effectual rising was problematic. The Assembly was unpopular with the masses, who remembered besides the punishment they had received during the insurrection of June, 1848, and had little care to try conclusions with the troops again. Moreover Louis Napoleon's appeal to universal suffrage was a skilful move. So the first day wore through in somewhat sterile agitation, and Victor Hugo slept, or rather spent a sleepless night, in the house of a stranger—in a delightful domestic nest which he describes with an artist's feeling for the effectiveness of contrast.

The next morning he visited his own home; learned that a police-officer had been to the place the day before; went off in a cab to the classic region of revolt, the Faubourg Saint Antoine; found that there had already been some fighting; that the barricade erected mainly by the representatives was taken, and Representative Baudin killed. Here, in view of the entire apathy of the Faubourg,

Victor Hugo acknowledges that he felt the cause of resistance to be well-nigh hopeless. Nevertheless he did not surcease from his efforts. There were more meetings, more haranguings of the people, more endeavours to issue proclamations, though the difficulty of getting anything printed was almost insuperable, and another flying visit to his home. Then, after an evening all lurid with battle and the coming storm, he found refuge for the night once more in a friend's house.

The third day, further proclamations; and also, which is more perhaps to the purpose, greater signs of a popular rising—barricades in every direction, which Victor Hugo visits,—and a great deal of firing. The hearts of the insurgents are elate; and Victor Hugo is even considering whether it may not be desirable to spare the life of Louis Napoleon when taken, and so help on the cause of the abolition of capital punishment. But at this moment the troops, who have hitherto been acting more or less fitfully, put forth their whole power. The boulevards are swept with grape. Volleys of musketry are fired in every direction. The people in the streets are bayoneted and sabred down.

This, according to Victor Hugo's constant contention, was mere murder, a cowardly massacre of non-combatants, having for its only object intimidation. And even M. de Maupas, the Prefect of Police at the time, and one of the four chief agents in the *Coup d'État*, seems to admit that the President's military adviser, Saint Arnaud, had purposely allowed the insurrection to gather head so as to quell it more effectually and for ever. If this were really Saint Arnaud's object, he succeeded most entirely. Paris

was thoroughly cowed. There were, during the same evening and night of December 4th, further barricades defended and taken, further deeds of violence. But the fight was virtually spluttering out. Victor Hugo fled from place to place, striving in vain to kindle the dying embers, seeing on his way many a scene of blood and sorrow, to be thereafter chronicled in his "Histoire d'un Crime," or to find a place in his poetry and fiction. But the game was played out and irretrievably lost. From the 5th he was a mere fugitive, flitting hither and thither, and lurking in one hiding-place after another. Madame Drouet's devotion here stood him in good stead; and on December 14th, by means of a false passport and a disguise, he succeeded in reaching Brussels.[1]

[1] M. de Maupas says the Government could easily have laid hands upon him if it had wished to do so; and this seems quite probable.

## CHAPTER IX.

AS one who has suffered shipwreck upon the stormy waters of life and bravely struggles to the shore, so did Victor Hugo reach Brussels on December 14, 1851. The cause for which he had fought lay in ruins; the party to which he belonged was hopelessly beaten and dispersed; his private fortune, the result, as he tells us, of his own toil, was greatly impaired. Yet not for a moment did he bate heart or hope. "Never once," his son says, "did his best friends, his own family, . . . hear from his lips a single word of discouragement or sadness that might betray the secret emotions caused by so terrible a wrench from all that he held dear." His pen was his sword, and with his pen he determined to attack the master of legions, by whom he had been driven from the soil of France.

Brussels was already full or filling with refugees. They were republicans for the most part, though with a smaller proportion of royalists, and mixed in character as well as politics. Many were men of mark, General Lamoricière, Émile de Girardin the famous journalist, and others. But Victor Hugo, of course, overtopped them all. In January he had taken up his quarters at No. 27,

in the picturesque beautiful Grande Place, the great square where Counts Egmont and Horn were beheaded when Alva ruled in the Netherlands—the square that witnessed the ball on the night before Waterloo; and there, in a fairly-large apartment commanding a full view of the Hotel de Ville and its beautiful spire, he received many visitors, and worked assiduously. The visitors would come and go while he was writing. But they never took off his attention; for at the point of his pen he felt, as it were, his adversary's sword in the great duel between them, and his whole soul was in the combat. At first he intended to open his attack with a history of the *Coup d'État*; and he states that he actually commenced the "Histoire d'un Crime" on December 14th, the very day of his arrival in Brussels. But soon he seems to have felt that the times required something more stirring than a history, however impassioned, some more direct appeal to God and man against the wrong that had been perpetrated. Accordingly, though he completed the "Histoire d'un Crime" on May 5th, 1852, he did not publish it then, nor for twenty-five years afterwards. Now, with a pen all quivering with indignation, he was writing one of the most superb pieces of invective in literature, "Napoléon le Petit."

I know no other work that is quite like it. Macaulay's article on Barrère is cold by comparison. Even Milton's "Eikonoklastes" is not so uniformly at white heat. Almost literally the language seems molten with passion, and rolls in a stream like lava, lurid, scorching, devouring. As the reader is rushed through page after page, the horror of Louis Napoleon's crimes deepens upon him.

What manner of ruler can this have been who solemnly swore his oaths before God and man, and then violated them so cynically? What kind of government was this which he had instituted? What crimes were these, what mire of blood, what infamy of cruel persecution, through which he had crawled his way to power? What eloquence had he quenched in the process? By what abject tools had he been absolved and declared innocent? So, through chapter after chapter, is the reader borne breathless and indignant,—noting every here and again some passage of brilliant rhetoric, like the famous description of Mirabeau as the incarnation of a New World speaking to the Old.

The book burst into that newer world like a bombshell in July, 1852;—and one of the effects of the explosion was to blow Victor Hugo himself out of Belgium. The country was given to hospitality, and not unmindful to entertain strangers and political refugees; and it was a country where the liberty of the press had due recognition. But, for all that, it was a very little country beside a very large country, and to suffer the *de facto* government of France to be outraged, might prove perilous. So, as the existing laws did not provide adequate machinery for causing Victor Hugo to "move on," a special law was passed to enable the government to get rid of such a dangerous guest. His sons, who had heard the thunder of the *Coup d'État* from behind the prison walls of the Conciergerie, had joined him on their release in January, 1852; and all three together left Antwerp on the 1st of August, and, merely passing through England, landed in Jersey on the 5th.

The house which the Hugo family occupied in the island stands on the low shore, a little way out of St. Helier, and bears the designation of 3, Marine Terrace. It is an ordinary seaside house enough, stuccoed and slate-roofed, with no pretensions or special character, but deriving a slightly French look from its green shutters. Along the back, towards the shore, there is a greenhouse with grapes, and then a little garden with some evergreens, and then a strip planted with tamarisks,—which, as I was told, I know not how truly, had been brought from France, and, with an exile's tenderness, set there by Victor Hugo himself. A sort of sandy ridge hides the sea from the lower rooms. Beyond this ridge stretch the sands, all studded with rocks, and then come the encircling waters—a peaceful, sunny expanse on a fine day, but, with a rising tide and a stormy wind a very devil's caldron of frothing yeast.

The house has as few pretensions internally as externally, and as the autumn began to gather, seemed dreary enough to the exiles. "There is nothing so icy cold as that English whiteness," says Victor Hugo, describing in after years the effect of the whitewashed walls. "The place was like a piece of built methodism." Why then had they chosen to live there? A little by the choosing of chance, and because it happened to be the first dwelling they had found to let. A little, too, as M. Vacquerie tells us in his "Miettes de l'Histoire," because it was near the town, and Mdlle. Hugo's twenty summers craved some amusement. Madame Hugo, who had been ill at the time of the *Coup d'État*, and seems to have so far remained in France, soon joined her husband and

sons. Let us look at the group first through her eyes, and then through the eyes of the poet himself.

"Our life," she writes to one of her relations, on the 13th of October, "is regular, quiet, and in part devoted to work. The country is superb, and all articles of food are abundant, easily obtained, and a little cheaper than in Paris. The land is pre-eminently that of freedom. Policemen are unknown. Passports are papers of which the meaning is not understood. Everybody comes and goes as suits his particular fancy. . . . The Queen of England is greatly worshipped. . . . I am extremely pleased with Charles. He accepts his new life as a philosopher—wears thick boots and coarse clothing, grows stout, fishes, is followed by a dog which has taken a fancy to him, is in excellent spirits, and thereby gives life to our home. He has begun a book of which three-quarters are finished, but the arrival of M. and his wife have interrupted him. . . . The sojourn here of Toto (François Victor Hugo) has prevented young Charles, whom his father calls the 'indefatigable idler,' from continuing to work at his volume. Charles works for twelve hours at a stretch, and then the slightest thing disturbs him. For the rest, he has entirely given up dress and all frivolous spending of money. Exile has been of the greatest benefit to my dear child. . . . It does not suit my daughter so well, nor, indeed, did her moral health require so heroic a remedy. But winter is coming soon, and here people dance a great deal, stupidly, but still they dance. Get Victor (François) to tell you what the dancing routs of Jersey are like."

Does not this extract introduce us pleasantly, familiarly, to the Hugo family? Does it not bring before us the kind of change which transportation from Paris had produced in their lives? How dull the gaieties of St. Helier seem to these gay young Parisians! How much, as we learn further from M. Asseline, the young men miss the dissipations of the metroplis of pleasure! But they accept the inevitable cheerfully, and put a good face on evil fortune. They work, they ride, they fish,

they fence, they bathe, they take photographs.[1] Charles, who had evidently been developing dandy tastes upon the boulevards, now dresses manfully in homespun; and Miss Adèle will gladly accept the Jersey dances in default of more brilliant assemblies.

Victor Hugo, too, has painted us a picture of his home at this time—a picture as severe and gloomy as a Spagnoletto or Zurbaran — dead earnest every brush-stroke of it:

"Those who dwelt in this house . . . of melancholy aspect . . . were a group, or let us rather say a family. They were exiles. The eldest was one of those men who, at a given moment, are no longer wanted in their native land. He was leaving a popular assembly; the others, who were young, were leaving a prison. To have written aught, is not that a sufficient motive for bolts and bars? Whither should thought lead if not to a dungeon?

"The prison had released them into exile.

"The eldest, the father, had all his dear ones by his side, with the exception of his eldest daughter, who had been unable to follow him. His son-in-law was with her.[2]

"Silent they often leant over a table, or sat on a bench, grave, musing together, thinking without speech of the two who were away. . . . One morning, at the end of November, two of the inhabitants of this place, the father and the younger of the sons, were sitting in the parlour. They were silent like men after a shipwreck.

"The rain fell, the wind howled, the house was as it were deafened by the external clamour. Both were sunk in thought, absorbed, perchance, in considering the coincidence of a beginning of winter and a beginning of exile.

"Suddenly the son lifted up his voice" [I am translating quite literally], "and questioned the father:

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[1] M. Vacquerie, who was of the party, thus describes their occupations.

[2] The reference here, I imagine, is to the daughter who was sleeping her long sleep by the waters of the Seine.

"'What do you think of this exile?

"'That it will be long.'

"'How do you intend to employ it?

"'I shall contemplate the ocean.'

"There was a silence. The father resumed:

"'And you?'

"'I,' said the son, 'I shall translate Shakespeare.'"

Fortunately there is evidence that Victor Hugo was not always in this tragic mood during his residence at Marine Terrace; for on the door of one of the upper rooms are scratched, in his handwriting and with his signature, the words "spes," "pax"—"hope" and "peace." And, more fortunately still, he did a great deal during his nineteen years of exile besides contemplating the ocean. He wrought without remission, at prose and verse. And the firstfruits of his toil was a volume of poems, published in 1853. His Muse had been all but silent since she sang of the burial of the great Napoleon in 1840; she now put a sterner string to her lyre, and sang of the misdeeds of Napoleon "the Little." The title of the new book frankly indicates its character. It is called "Les Châtiments."

A terrible book, a book of lashing invective and sarcasm, a book well named "The Chastisements," for in verse after verse one watches as it were the wriggle of the lash—aye, sees the spurt of blood where it falls, and hears the sharp cry of pain. Is such a book justifiable one is tempted to ask? Is there not something cruel in thus using the pen as a Russian soldier would use a knout? But here, I think, Victor Hugo must be exonerated. There is no sign throughout his life that he ever

employed his tremendous literary power for the mere purpose of inflicting pain. He could hit out freely enough on occasion, and probably took a certain pleasure—as what pugilist does not?—in the skill and vigour with which he delivered his blows. But he had not simply the mauling of his opponents in view. He really fought for what he had persuaded himself, rightly or wrongly, were causes of momentous importance. The Empress of the French,[1] it is said, had a strong desire to see this very book, and, after reading it, observed, "M. Victor Hugo must hate us very much." And so he did. He hated the Emperor with a gamekeeper's hatred of a stoat or a pike, as a noxious thing to which no "law" could justifiably be given.

So in the face of the Empire and its orgies, he evokes the crime on which it had been founded, and the victims it had done to death, or sent to rot in the penal settlement of Cayenne. He takes for the title of each of the books into which the volume is divided, one of the cant expressions used by the supporters of the *Coup d'État*, "Society is saved," "Order is re-established," "Religion is glorified," and flashes upon the words the fierce light of his satire. Poor Louis Napoleon, how sadly he fares in the hands of this angry opponent; what ignominy is heaped upon his head! Did his uncle, the great Napoleon, deserve punishment for arresting the march of Liberty? It might have seemed that that punishment had fallen when he saw the Grand Army melt into an interminable horror of snow during the retreat from Moscow. But not so. The full thunderbolt of God's

[1] Of the Empress he always spoke with perfect courtesy.

wrath had not yet fallen. Was the punishment consummated amid the wild confusion of defeat at Waterloo? Still not yet. There were worse things in store for the ruined Emperor. Yes, worse things than that; and even worse things than to be chained to the rock of St. Helena. The worst chastisement of all lay in his nephew's guilt and shame. Translate this back in thought from bald prose to such verse as makes of each situation—Moscow, Waterloo, St. Helena—a mighty picture, and you will understand the peculiar kind of lyrical satire that infuses most of this book. Or take another poem, the "Souvenir de la Nuit du 4" ("Reminiscence of the Night of the 4th"). It is the account, which Victor Hugo has also written in prose, of an incident he had witnessed on the evening of the 4th of December, when he was hurrying hither and thither in Paris for the purpose of stirring the people to resistance. A child, a boy of seven, had been shot down as he ran across the street. Some one had carried him to the room where he lived with his grandmother—a place quite humble, but decent, and every way respectable. The little corpse lay in the old woman's arms, and she was murmuring over it half-broken words, "to think that he called me grandmama this morning," "only seven years old," "the masters at his school were so pleased with him," "he was all that I had left of his mother." Then they took the child and undressed him. There was a top in the pocket. As they drew off his socks the grandmother started; "Don't hurt him," she cried, and taking the poor, cold feet into her withered hands, she tried to warm them at the hearth. Then she burst into terrible

sobs. Why had they killed her child? What had he done? What government of murderers and brigands was this?

"Mother," says the poet, taking up his parable,

"Mother, it is clear that when you asked that question you did not understand politics. M. Napoléon—for that, it seems, really is his name—is poor and a prince; he is fond of palaces; it pleases him to have horses, lacqueys, money for his play, his table, his pleasures, and his hunting. At the same time he acts as the saviour of the family, the church, and society; he also desires to have Saint Cloud for residence, where, mid the roses of summer, the prefects and mayors may come and worship him. And that is why it is necessary that old grandmothers with their poor, gray, trembling fingers should sew the shrouds of seven-years old children."

This is a very fine poem. There is a simplicity and directness about it beyond praise. Almost each line is self-sufficient, pregnant, and decisive, like a line from a dialogue of Euripides.

And here, perhaps, it may be convenient to take a general survey of what Victor Hugo wrote and thought about Louis Napoleon and his government. Of "Napoléon le Petit" I have already spoken, and also of the "Châtiments." The third book in which he treated of the *Coup d'État*, the "Histoire d'un Crime," was written in the first six months of 1852, but a good deal "worked upon" afterwards, as I should gather from the style, and not published till 1877. All three books may, for my present purpose, be taken together.

That they are in any sense impartial cannot be affirmed. When Michelet, the historian, was accused of partiality, he boldly accepted the charge, and declared that he was, and should ever remain, partial, strongly partial on the

side of justice and right. Victor Hugo would have rebutted any similar attack with the same reply. Was there anything to be said, he would have asked wonderingly, in favour of Louis Napoleon and his rout? Consequently, if we want to know how it came to pass that imperialism became possible in France, that the country ratified the *Coup d'État* and acclaimed the Empire by such overwhelming majorities, and that men of high character and ability, such as Montalembert, went with the President up to December, 1851, and some few even beyond—if we want information on these and kindred matters, we must look elsewhere. On these points Victor Hugo will not enlighten us. In his view Napoleon and his immediate instruments were malefactors, and all who supported them knaves, cowards, fools.

Such a way of looking at an important historical event is obviously a little wanting in discrimination. Nor can one altogether avoid a feeling of scepticism when noting thoughout these books what a dark cloud of infamy hovers over the one party, and what a brilliant light of virtue and glory illumines the other. Every general on the side of the *Coup d'État* is venal, every soldier drunken, every police-agent shameless. If one of these fautors of crime meets an honest patriot he hangs his head, stammers, and has nothing to say for himself. If insulted, however grossly, he reviles not again. Officers who are about to order wholesale butchery, offer their cheeks to the smiter with a compunction that would be quite edifying, if it did not so obviously spring from the terrors of an evil conscience. But what a change when we come to the other,

the right side! What courage, what ardent patriotism, what disinterestedness, what eloquence, what capacity for saying the right and telling thing exactly at the proper moment! The men of action among these advanced Republicans are heroes, the men of thought or speech geniuses. Here is So-and-so of whom the world never heard very much; he is a "pamphleteer like Courier, and a song-writer like Béranger."

Now, of course, there is exaggeration in all this. The supporters of the *Coup d'État* were not uniformly venal. Many had persuaded themselves that Louis Napoleon's strong hand was needed to save them from the vagaries of Victor Hugo's friends. The opponents of the *Coup d'État* were not uniformly the salt of the earth. They were a mixed body of men like the rest of us—good and evil together. And as to So-and-so, we may be quite sure, without reading a word of his pamphlets or his songs, that he bore no resemblance to either Courier or Béranger. But when one looks beyond the exaggeration, when one tries to get to the real essential history of the *Coup d'État*, then I fear it must be admitted that Victor Hugo's view is not substantially unjust. The *Coup d'État* was an act of illegality. It violated an existing constitution. It could only have been justified by the extreme peril of society. But in December, 1851, no such terrible peril existed. Though the future of France was dark, it was not desperate. The difficulties ahead were not insuperable. And in looking for a solution of these difficulties, Louis Napoleon was guided rather by his own selfish interests than by care for the well-being of France. Therefore the government which he founded was a

government of decay. It had no root in the better aspirations of the country, and could produce no ultimate fruit. In the *Coup d'État* lurked the germs of Sedan. Accordingly history, for all her large tolerance, will refuse to obliterate Victor Hugo's terrible words. Those words will live by their literary power. They will live also, too many of them, by their truth.

But now another *Coup d'État* comes across our way,—yes, in territory subject to her gracious Majesty the Queen, another *Coup d'État*—for so does Charles Hugo designate the events that led to his father's expulsion from Jersey. The reader, however, need be under no alarm. This was a *Coup d'État* without effusion of blood. No barricades were erected in the streets of St. Helier. No volleys of grape and musketry mowed down the peaceful citizens of that bright and busy town. No autocratic English governor determined to suppress the liberties of the island, and march through crime to his nefarious ends. Comparatively speaking, this political event must be regarded as a tame affair.

Divested of a good deal of extraneous matter, its history appears to be somewhat as follows: in 1854-5, the English and French armies were fighting side by side in the Crimea. A close and friendly alliance united the two countries, and mutual civilities took place between their respective rulers. This was naturally gall and wormwood to the French exiles. To them the Emperor appeared simply as a criminal and outlaw; and France, so long as he held sway, ought, in their view, to have been under a kind of international interdict. Accordingly they wrote and spoke very intemperately about the alliance, and with

peculiar and offensive virulence about the Emperor's visit to the Queen, and the Queen's visit to the Emperor. This was, of course, not calculated to please the English public. To be hospitable is one thing, but to be lectured and insulted by one's guests is another. English feeling rose pretty high, as it was sure to do when England's sons were shedding their blood against the same enemy as the sons of France. Nor in such a cause was Jersey likely to be behind the rest of the Empire. The French exiles in the island had always been particularly busy. They were a small active band, living in the kind of agitation that exile fosters, seeing the baleful shadow of the Emperor everywhere, keeping the keenest of noses for a spy, writing apace, issuing a newspaper, *L'Homme* ("Man"), to which they confided the story of their wrongs and hopes—and, in short, looking at everything through the somewhat narrow lens of their own position. Sooner or later a collision between them and the islanders seemed inevitable. On the 10th of October, 1855, *L'Homme* published a letter that had been addressed by three of the London exiles to the Queen. Why had the Queen gone to Paris? the letter asked. She herself was, so the writers were pleased to say, "as honest a woman as it was possible for a queen to be." What did she mean by going to Paris, where she had "put Canrobert in his bath"—a graceful allusion to the Order of the Bath,—"drunk champagne, and kissed Jérome Bonaparte,"—where she "had sacrificed everything, her dignity as a queen, her scruples as a woman, her pride as an aristocrat, her feelings as an Englishwoman, her rank, her race, her sex, everything, even to her

shame, . . . even to her honour"? That this letter was in the worst possible taste needs no demonstration. The people of Jersey, who, as Madame Hugo had remarked on first landing in the island, were particularly loyal, and greatly attached to the Queen, took it in very evil part. They were in no mood to appreciate the subtle distinction drawn by Charles Hugo. *L'Homme* had possibly published the letter without endorsing its sentiments; but *L'Homme* had published the letter. That was enough. An indignation meeting was held on the 13th of October, and, amid great enthusiasm, resolved to petition the governor to suppress the paper. Then the mob made an attack on the publishing office; but not a very determined attack, for the besiegers were effectually put to flight by a shower and one policeman. However, the town was in an uproar, the exiles were in peril, and Victor Hugo sent his manuscripts into hiding. Whereupon the governor ordered the editorial staff of *L'Homme* to leave the island. This raised the spirit of the exiles; and Victor Hugo drew up a protest,—in which, after referring, not very relevantly, to the "glove of Castlereag,"—whom I take to be our old friend Lord Castlereagh,—he went on to declare that Louis Napoleon was very wicked, that the English Government had for ally "the crime-emperor," and that England would shortly become "an annexe of the French Empire." "And now," the protest concluded, "expel us." Whereupon they were expelled. The protest is dated the 17th of October, and on the 31st Victor Hugo and his son François Victor left by the steamer for Guernsey.

To what extent this expulsion was legal according to

the Constitution of Jersey, I do not know. The act was clearly one which the exiles had done their best to provoke, by going counter in a very offensive way to a popular feeling. This, however, does not justify it; and whether lawful or not, it seems clearly to have been a mistake. *L'Homme* and the exiles were not doing much harm to any one, and might well have been left alone. That the expelled should have regarded this new misfortune as due to the Machiavellian influence of the Emperor, is comprehensible enough. To their fevered fancy the Emperor was ubiquitous;—did not Victor Hugo himself consider that Lord Palmerston had refused to respite Tapner, the murderer, out of deference to the wishes of that potentate? But we, who look at these things with the unbiassed eyes of posterity, may rest content with simpler explanations.

## CHAPTER X.

WITH the transfer of the poet's home from Jersey to Guernsey, we may, for a time at least, bid farewell to politics, and return to literature. It was while living at Hauteville House, Guernsey, that he published the masterpieces of his later life.

But first a word as to the house itself—a house which will for ever be associated with Victor Hugo, as Abbotsford is associated with Scott, and Rydal Mount with Wordsworth. It stands about half way up a little narrow picturesque ill-paved street that ascends from St. Peter Port to the Haute Ville, and is, externally, as respectable a house as need be, such a house as a well-to-do country solicitor or doctor might inhabit, with a little front yard containing two trees—evergreen oaks if I remember right—and a door standing well in the centre, and two windows on each side of the door. But once within, we bid farewell to the commonplace directly. Victor Hugo was evidently an æsthete "before letters," an æsthete before the time when old oak, blue china, and tapestry had become fashionable. He must for years have collected these articles with assiduity and excellent discretion. The place is full of them: old oak, tiles, and a tapestried ceiling in the dining-room; old oak in the billiard- and

smoking-rooms; old oak in the almost palatial guest-chamber prepared for Garibaldi, and to which Garibaldi never came; and tapestry pretty well everywhere. Everywhere too, inscriptions in Latin or French, containing, as one may suppose, the quintessential wisdom which the poet-philosopher had distilled from the leaves of the Tree of Life: "The People are now little, but they will be great;" "Night, death, life;" "Life itself is an exile." There are portraits too of Victor Hugo,[1] and one of Madame Hugo, painted when she would be about thirty-five, a dark, handsome woman, with fine white arms and shoulders, and a face puissant, though scarcely intellectual, and an almost voluptuous look in the eyes. A few drawings executed by the poet are there also; for this man of many aptitudes was a busy draughtsman, and with any kind of instrument, and any sort of pigment—ink, sepia, cigar ash, charcoal, mulberry juice, burnt onion, tooth paste,—would draw the vividest, most fantastic pictures, and might unmistakably have been a notable imaginative painter if he had not been the first poet of his time. At the back of the house a garden, fairly large and delightfully situated, tosses into every room the perfume of its flowers.

But all this while we have not penetrated into the temple's inner shrine, not reached the place where the poet's thoughts were moulded into their often perfect form of words. In order to get to this, we must leave the ground floor where are the dining-room and billiard-

[1] Not very satisfactory portraits. Victor Hugo said in later life, "I really was a better looking young fellow than they used to paint me."

rooms; must pass the drawing-room with its somewhat rococo gilding; must go higher still, past the Garibaldi chamber on the next floor; and then up another flight of stairs, and through a short book-shelved corridor, when we shall find ourselves in a curious sort of glass-enclosed place, a place more like a photographer's studio than anything else to which I can compare it; and there, there in one corner, we shall see a black shelf, a kind of simple standing-desk;—and at that shelf Victor Hugo wielded his untiring pen.

With such a view! Through all the glass sides of the place, wherever one looks, there is a very festival of nature's beauty. To the right is the green slope of the hill, gardens and trees, and a fort. Beyond lies the great encircling sea, with the long straight spine of Sark on the horizon. Nearer in are the twin islands of Jethou and Herm, and, dotted here and there, rocks round which the white foam chafes almost constantly. Back towards the shore again, Castle Cornet stands on its rock below us,—and there is the port, and the shipping, and the long low line of the coast trending out at Saint Sampson; and back again, further along the left, the town rising against the hill, and the red-roofed houses jostling one another at our feet. Well had this eagle spirit chosen his eyrie. One likes to think of him watching the changes of light and shadow that play over this superb expanse of land and sea, and seem to give it almost a voice.

Close to this unique study is the little garret room in which Victor Hugo mostly slept. When I saw it, his father's sword lay on the bed, and there were on the walls two pictures of Victor Hugo himself as he lay dead.

But death was not yet in the winter of 1855–6, when Victor Hugo would be moving into Hauteville House. He was then a hale and hearty middle-aged man of fifty-four or so, with over thirty years more of good work in him; and life, even life in the saddened garb of exile, must have smiled at him not unpleasantly as he set up his household gods in his new abode, and began to adorn it to his taste. One of his favourite sayings, we are told by M. Asseline, was to the effect that "a little work is a burden, and much work a pleasure." And if we take this wholesome motto for true, as it indubitably is, he had many a happy hour in that glass study of his. His habits seem to have been very regular. He would rise at six, or shortly after, refresh himself with a sight of nature in her first morning beauty from the sort of balcony that runs round the top of the house, and then write steadily, without interruption, till twelve.

"After this, with his legs a little stiff, for he had acquired the habit of standing as he wrote, and of walking when in the act of composition, he would come slowly down the stairs, the tapestry deadening the sound of his steps, and would lightly shake off his graver thoughts, and give them a holiday for the rest of the day. He was now no longer the poet, the inspired prophet of a few minutes ago; he was the friend who came to be with his family, the dear kind friend who had always some pleasant word for greeting, and a tender caress for farewell. Ah, admirable great man! And how can I, when the word work is mentioned, not call to mind the ingenious tender devices by which he beguiled us to follow his example; for he did not like to see any one idle about him. 'No day without its line,' he was wont to say."

So even Charles, "the indefatigable idler," who had now reached the age of twenty-nine, having been born

on the 2nd of November, 1826, was won to labour, and wrought at his novels pretty regularly; while François, who was two years younger, having been born on the 22nd of October, 1828, set himself assiduously to the gigantic task of translating Shakespeare.

The latter was the more serious spirit of the two. "The younger is the austere one," said Victor Hugo in the somewhat grandiloquent account which he gave of his two sons in the introduction to Charles Hugo's "Hommes de l'Exil;"—"he never loses an hour, he entertains a religious respect for time, his habits are at once those of a Parisian and a monk;" and the young man himself describes his existence at this time as that of a "Benedictine," and speaks of its "salutary monotonousness," and the health, content, and serenity of the household. In their opinions on political, literary, and social matters, the sons were closely in accord with the father. This indeed was counted to them for sin by Veuillot, of the venomous pen, who complained that, however much they might grow in years, they never seemed to put forth any branch or twig that ventured to stray beyond the paternal enclosure. But, after all, their father was Victor Hugo; and, with such a father, a certain ductility of mind was excusable. Most of us, I think, will consider that there is something beautiful, and one may almost say august, in the sight of these three men so bravely, and with such unity of purpose, doing battle against adverse fortune.

And what was the first jar of honey that came from this busy hive? A book of poems by Victor Hugo, with a preface dated March, 1856, and "Les Contemplations" for title.

The book is divided into two parts, of which the first is called "Formerly," and contains poems either written between the years 1830 and 1843, or relating to these years; while the second is called "To-day," and refers, in the same manner, to the years intervening between 1843 and 1855. And why should the poet thus have taken the year 1843 as marking so distinct an epoch in his life, and separating the present from the past? Because it was in that year that he had lost his elder daughter, Léopoldine. She had been married, on the 15th of February, to Charles Vacquerie, the brother of one of Victor Hugo's staunchest admirers. The marriage was a marriage of love on both sides, and altogether happy. But on the 4th of September death stepped in, and turned the joy of both families into mourning. The Vacqueries lived at Villequier on the Seine. The young couple went out on the day in question for a sail down the river. A sudden wind upset the boat. The young bride seems to have lost her presence of mind, and resisted all her husband's efforts to detach her from the sinking craft. He was an expert swimmer, and would probably have taken her safely to the shore if she had yielded to his efforts. That he might easily have saved himself there seems no question. As it was, both were drowned.[1]

Such is the terrible tragedy that gives its tone to much of the second part of the "Contemplations." The father looks back into his daughter's short life—he sees her in her childhood,—"Ah, do you remember the pretty little dress she wore?" He thinks of her as she used to

[1] There is a striking account of the accident in Alphonse Karr's "Guêpes" for September, 1843.

dance about his desk as he sat at work, and scribble her formless pictures, her little lispings of art, over his papers, —"and, I don't know how it happened," he says, "but my best lines always seemed to spring into life on the parts of the paper that she had touched." He hears her at her play, too, listens to her pretty child-warblings of pleasure, as in the summer days she flitted here and there beneath his window. Then memory brings back the happy evenings they used to spend together—the book, or story —all that gracious companionship—there is none surely more beautiful — between an intelligent girl and her father. Gone, gone, things of the past, covered one and all by the cere-cloth of death. And with the thought of death come the obstinate questionings, the dark misgivings, that death suggests. Does she know aught in the grave where she lies? Feeling so cold in her narrow bed, does she ask, "has my father forgotten me?" Forgotten? How could that be? Twelve years afterwards, addressing his wife, he can say that no single day has passed on which they have not incensed her name with love and prayer. And in that same twelfth year, being in Guernsey, on All Souls' Day, the "Day of the Dead," as the French call it, he turns his accustomed thought to the little churchyard by the Seine, and would so fain go thither once more and carry to the grave his tribute of flowers; failing which—for the bitter waters of exile flow between him and the place—he wafts to his dead child, wherever she may be, the spirit of the book in which her memory is enshrined.

But though Léopoldine Vacquerie occupies so important a place in the "Contemplations," she by no means fills

the book to the exclusion of other subjects. Victor Hugo's last volume of poems, exclusive of the "Châtiments," was "Les Rayons et Les Ombres," published in 1840; we are now in 1856, and in the years between there is room for many poetic moods. So he gives us here poems of all sorts and kinds, from love poems that for "motive," aye, and fresh lyrical directness, are not unlike those written by Burns in honour of "Bonnie Jean," to poems that are as the "trumpet of a prophecy" of the good things in store when Christ shall have converted Belial, and other equally desirable, if remote, results have been attained. Some poems, too, there are here that may fittingly be called satires, in the old acceptance of the term. In short, essentially a miscellaneous volume of verse, and also, in some sort, a link between the poet's earlier and later manner.

For now we reach a new and admirable development in his genius. With certain minor differences, the volumes extending from the "Feuilles d'Automne" to the "Contemplations" are, if we except the "Châtiments," fairly similar in form and manner. But in the two first volumes of the "Légende des Siècles," the poet gives us something novel, striking, superb. No doubt there were, here and there in Victor Hugo's former works, passages, as notably the description in the "Burgraves" of Barbarossa sleeping his age-long sleep, which, read in the light of the later book, seem presageful of its characteristic beauties. Such passages are, however, rare. They are as the one swallow that does not make a summer. The "Légende des Siècles" came upon us in the autumn of 1859 like a revelation.

Seldom, surely, can poet have chanced upon a subject, or class of subjects, more in harmony with his genius. Not history did Victor Hugo now propose to paint—history with her severe outline, her impartial calm, her attitude of strict equity. What he here took for his model was history's strange shadowy sister, who sometimes looks as if she were history's double, and sometimes takes her place, and sometimes mocks and mimics her, and sometimes, most often, perhaps, while maintaining a certain resemblance, assumes proportions, large, heroic, real yet unreal, and sometimes seems so altogether unlike that it is difficult to trace any relationship at all. Legend was to be his subject; the "Legend of the Ages" was to inspire him for the nonce. Or, to change the image, like a paladin of old venturing forth on some hard quest, he had set himself to conquer and make his own the cloud-land of fancy and imagination that has gathered from the dawn of time round the sober world of fact.

And well was he equipped for the adventure. Only a great poet can leave with impunity the solid ground of nature, and attempt to give reality to the supernatural. As we read the "Ancient Mariner," it never occurs to us to question any of the incidents of that uncanny voyage. The old man's spell is on us, as it was on the wedding guest. Coleridge utters his words of magic, and the transformation is effected. We see for the time with his eyes. And so, in this wonderful work, Victor Hugo holds each of us, "like" any "seven-years child," while he unfolds many a marvellous tale. We never think of doubting what lives so fully in his imagination, what

he reproduces so vividly. As well might we doubt the reality of those scorching fires of Hell that had left their mark, as his contemporaries thought, upon the face of Dante; or of the fearful sights and sounds that beset Christian on his way through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. These things seem natural enough in the world which a great imagination creates. And so here, when Eblis, at work in his laboratory of evil, takes all God's best gifts and transforms them into the locust, and God in turn takes the locust and makes of it a sun, we are not astonished. When the lions to which Daniel has been thrown speak to us their grave thoughts, we listen without surprise. When the archangel shears off the head of the Emperor Ratbert, and wipes his sword upon the wind-vexed evening clouds, our only feeling is one of satisfaction that justice has been done. We follow unhesitatingly Canute the Parricide in his march of horror, when, being dead, he fares forth into the darkness, and takes the snow of the mountain to make him a winding-sheet, and feels its whiteness sullied, drop after drop, by a red rain of blood, and so wanders on for ever, afraid to appear in the light of God's countenance. But here a quotation will help me, for a part of this poem has been excellently rendered by Mr. Garnett:

"Evening came
And hushed the organ in the holy place,
And the priests, issuing from the temple doors,
Left the dead king in peace. Then he arose,
Opened his gloomy eyes, and grasped his sword,
And went forth loftily. The massy walls
Yielded before the phantom, like a mist.

There is a sea where Aarhuus, Altona,
And Elsinore vast domes and shadowy towers
Glass in deep waters. Over this he went
Dark, and still Darkness listened for his foot
Inaudible, itself being but a dream.
Straight to Mount Savo went he, gnawed by time,
And thus, 'O mountain, buffeted of storms,
Give me of thy huge mantle of deep snow
To frame a winding-sheet.' The mountain knew him,
Nor dared refuse, and with his sword Canute
Cut from its flank white snow, enough to make
The garment he desired; and then he cried,
'Old mountain! death is dumb; but tell me thou
The way to God.' More deep each dread ravine
And hideous hollow yawned, and sadly thus
Answered that hoar associate of the clouds:
'Spectre, I know not, I am always here.'
Canute departed, and with head erect,
All white and ghastly in his robe of snow,
Went forth into great silence and great night,
By Iceland and Norway. After him
Gloom swallowed up the universe. He stood
A sovran kingdomless, a lonely ghost
Confronted with Immensity. He saw
The awful Infinite, at whose portal pale
Lightning sinks dying; Darkness, skeleton
Whose joints are nights, and utter Formlessness
Moving confusedly in the horrible dark,
Inscrutable and blind. No star was there,
Yet something like a haggard gleam; no sound
But the dull tide of Darkness, and her dumb
And fearful shudder. ''Tis the tomb,' he said:
'God is beyond!' Three steps he took, then cried.
'Twas deathly as the grave, and not a voice
Responded, nor came any breath to sway
The snowy mantle, with unsullied white
Emboldening the spectral wanderer.
Sudden he marked how, like a gloomy star,
A spot grew broad upon his livid robe;

> Slowly it widened, raying darkness forth ;
> And Canute proved it with his spectral hands :
> It was a drop of blood."

But in the world of legend there are other things besides the supernatural and marvellous. There are things which copy fact so closely as to be almost undistinguishable from it. That Philip II., the "patient writer of the Escurial," as Motley calls him, sat at his desk, day after day, compassing the downfall of England, this we know. And may it not be true that some last puff of the tempest that scattered the Armada did actually penetrate into the Escurial garden and deflower the little Infanta's rose, bringing a flush of surprise and anger into her sweet child's face? "Madam," is the duenna's explanation and comment, "everything in the world belongs to princes except the wind." Was ever moral of a great event so daintily enforced? But there is another poem in the "Légende" in which we hug reality even more closely, the poem entitled "Les pauvres Gens" ("Poor Folk"). The world is not so ill a place but that this touching and beautiful story has had its counterpart, many a time and oft, among the authentic annals of the poor. The fisherman who takes two little orphans into his already overbrimming family belongs fortunately to a world not altogether of legend.

Between the story of the "Pauvres Gens" on the one hand, and Canute the Parricide on the other, come legends of chivalry—of the mighty battle between Roland and Oliver, of the taking of Narbonne by Aymerillot, of the Cid, of other paladins;—legends of the East, of Sultan Mourad saved from the last extremity of hell by his kind-

ness to a swine; legends of the Renaissance, and of Pan singing his strange wild song on Olympus before the gods; legends of to-day; and also apocalyptic visions of the future.

For these last I confess to not caring very greatly. They are the preludes to a class of poem which finally invaded Victor Hugo's art, and made it too often diffuse, formless, and void of interest. The singular advantage to the poet of the subjects which he mainly treated in the "Légende" was their comparatively concrete character. Each contained a story; and, as he was an excellent story-teller, and a great artist to boot, he naturally set himself to tell his story as well as possible, and with as little abstract disquisition and declamation as might be. Thus the legends did him the inestimable service of holding his work together, of forcing him to concentrate himself.

Language and verse too are of the highest quality. There is a force, an almost rugged strength about the former quite new in French poetry. As Milton takes English, and hews it, like a sculptor hewing marble, into shapes of imperishable beauty, so here Victor Hugo takes French, a far less plastic material, and moulds it to his every purpose in his puissant hands. He never violates its laws, for, rash innovator as he has been called, he thoroughly respects the material in which he works. But he bends it to his fancy and imagination, and the result is superb. And as with the language, so with the verse. The French alexandrine becomes ductile to his touch, and as fit as our own blank verse for every highest poetic use. The "Légende des Siècles"

is the work of a great master. It marks an epoch in the history of French literature.

And with the prodigality of genius Victor Hugo was about to give to the world, beside this masterpiece in verse, a masterpiece in prose. The "Légende des Siècles" had appeared in the autumn of 1859. On April 3, 1862, was published simultaneously in Paris, Brussels, London, New York, Madrid, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Turin, the first volume of the "Misérables."

The book had been begun, we are told, long years before, even so far back as in the days anterior to 1848, and had afterwards been gradually worked upon, added to, altered. And it bears in some respects the mark of this slow fitfulness of growth. Not that there is any want of unity of effect or purpose. That is very far from being the case. But the unity, to use a very old image, which, however, is here so apposite that I must be forgiven for making it do service once more—the unity is that of a Gothic cathedral, and quite compatible with all kinds of episodical additions and outgrowths. These, in the "Misérables," are of very diverse interest and value. It would be too much to affirm that a description of the battle of Waterloo was essential to the book. No doubt the father of Marius, the second hero, is all but slain in that "king-making victory," and Marius himself greatly influenced in after years by the manner of his father's rescue. But to hold it necessary on this ground to give a full account of the battle is taking a very liberal view of the novelist's functions. Nevertheless few of us would wish Victor Hugo's description unwritten. It may or may not be

strategically exact—of this I am no judge. It is at least a fine effective piece of battle painting, and not to be spared. But when Marius in turn is rescued, and the novelist thereupon thinks it incumbent upon him to give an account of the origin and history of the sewers through which the wounded youth is borne,—why then we feel inclined to use the reader's privilege of "skipping." Except to a specialist, the sewers of Paris, regarded in their historical aspect, can scarcely have an interest for any one; and the specialist would probably regard Victor Hugo's erudition as not beyond cavil.

However, this is but playing in the outskirts of a mighty book, or, to go back to our cathedral image, entering by some little lateral door, and peeping at the side-chapels and sacristy to the neglect of the great dim nave and soaring choir. Let us enter, as enter we should, by the west portal which Victor Hugo himself has prepared for us.

"So long," says the preface, "as, owing to the operation of laws and customs, there exists a social damnation creating artificial hells in the midst of civilization, and complicating destiny, which is Divine, with an element of human fatality; so long as the three problems of the age, the degradation of man through proletarianism, the fall of woman through hunger, the atrophy of the child through night, are unsolved; so long as in certain regions social asphyxia is still possible; or, in other words, and looking at the matter from a more extended standpoint, so long as ignorance and misery remain upon the earth—so long books of this kind may not be without use."

Of the influence of laws and customs in all this, I may have somewhat to say hereafter. Meanwhile we will look into the "artificial hells" of which the novelist speaks.

Jean Valjean the hero, the leading character of the book, is a convict. He had stolen a loaf of bread for his starving sister and her seven starving children, and had thereupon been sent to the hulks. Here he remained for several years, and at last, when the story begins, comes forth into the world again, bearing in his heart a bitter hatred for his fellow-men. His first experiences of outside life are not calculated to dispel this feeling. Though able and willing to pay for a night's lodging, he is driven from place to place, and at last even barked and bitten out of a dog-kennel. Then a kindly soul directs him to the dwelling of the good bishop, Myriel. The man is quite worn out and desperate, and makes no attempt to conceal his character. But the saintly bishop entertains him hospitably, and as an equal, and sets him to sleep in the guest-chamber of the house. Jean Valjean wakes in the middle of the night. Evil and good contend in his breast. He rises stealthily, and steals his generous host's small supply of silver plate. In the morning he is found by the rural police with the spoons and forks on him, and naturally brought back as a thief. But M. Myriel obtains his release by saying that the articles have been given to him, and adds to the gift two silver candlesticks. Even yet, however, the evil in Jean Valjean's heart is not conquered. In a strange state of mental perturbation, he robs a child of a two-franc bit. Then a great horror of himself comes over him.

Nor is his repentance transient. We next find him as a beneficent manufacturer, under the name of M. Madeleine, making his own fortune and that of the district in which he has settled. He is honest, kindly, and generous.

One of his good works is to rescue a poor sick girl called Fantine, who has been seduced and heartlessly abandoned by a Paris student—a poor girl who, to support her little daughter, has sold all—her shame, her teeth, her hair. But just as he is about to bring together the dying mother and her child, a terrible complication arises in his own affairs. He hears that a man has been arrested for his own old theft of the two-franc bit, and may possibly be condemned. Then a fearful conflict arises in his breast. Is it his duty to give himself up to justice, to cut short his own most useful career, to go back to the living death of the hulks? Fiercely does the tempest rage in his brain. For a whole night it sways this way and that. At last right prevails. With immense difficulty he succeeds in reaching the place of trial in time to save the false Jean Valjean.

Does the reader follow Victor Hugo's thought? Here, he seems to say, is a man who has achieved the immensely difficult task of reforming his own character, a man who is good, wise, useful,—and yet, because of his past, because in a moment of fierce mental crisis he has deprived a child of two francs, he is branded and irretrievably ruined.

So poor Jean Valjean is retaken, and sent back to the hulks. But he escapes; and finds poor little Cosette—who meanwhile has been villainously used by the people to whom Fantine had confided her—and hides himself from pursuit in the great wilderness of Paris. There the child grows into a beautiful girl; and Love takes her destiny in hand, as Love sometimes does take in hand the destiny of men and maidens, and she gives her

heart to Marius de Pontmercy. But though Love be ready enough to direct our lives, he does not always lead them into the smoothest of paths, and Cosette and Marius have to pass over many rocks and direful places. Jean Valjean, too, has his troubles. Indeed one rather pities him than the two lovers, for they have youth and its hopefulness on their side, while he is old, and Cosette is his all. However, here again, he conquers all lower feeling, resigns his more than daughter to her lover, saves that lover's life at the risk of his own, and without that lover's knowledge; and then dies, almost forsaken, except at the very last, by those for whom he had done so much.

But how, by any weak process of epitome or analysis, convey to the reader any impression of the power of this great book? There are chapters upon chapters in it that for grandeur and pathos cannot be surpassed. Such is the chapter to which I have already alluded, the chapter entitled "Une tempête sous un crâne," describing the storm in Jean Valjean's brain when he is debating whether he should deliver himself up to justice. Such are the chapters relating to poor little Cosette,—her terrified walk in the dark to the village well —her little broken wooden shoe put out on Christmas eve in the hope that some Santa Claus might pass that way—though, heaven knows, no Santa Claus had ever put anything into it on previous occasions. Such—I am quoting almost at hazard—is the short chapter comparing Jean Valjean's position to that of a man lost and sinking in mid-ocean. And everywhere the descriptions live, the events move. We see it all. Each scene is present to us. And the characters live too. Bishop Myriel, apos-

tolic as he may be, is no lay figure. Jean Valjean is a man of very real flesh and blood. Poor Fantine one seems to know; and Cosette most certainly; and Marius as a "jeune premier" of a very French type. Marius' royalist grandfather, M. Gillenormand, is also genuine enough, if somewhat caricatured. And there are two characters that live not only as individuals, but as types. These are, Javert, the ideal policeman, whose life is wrecked on finding that Jean Valjean, though a convict, is not a scoundrel;—and Gavroche, the little street arab, the town sparrow of Paris. The latter with his light gaiety, his ready wit, his queer kindliness, his pluck under fire, may be said to have won a place in universal literature beside Gil Blas and Don Quixote, and mine uncle Toby, and Sam Weller. Did not M. Renan lately inform us how many years of study and anxious thought it had taken him to reach the high serenity of Gavroche's religious opinions?

Victor Hugo was not one of those novelists who are fond of masquerading in their own novels. We can nowhere point to any character of his and say that it is merely Victor Hugo in another dress, and represents either what he thought himself to be, or wished himself to be thought. The character who comes nearest to be an exception to this is Marius de Pontmercy, whose experiences have a very suggestive similarity to the early experiences of the novelist. Both have been brought up in monarchical opinions. Both have imperialist fathers who have served under Napoleon. Both work through imperialism to republicanism. Both fall in love—though that perhaps is not distinctive,—and in both cases the love-idyl is con-

nected with a garden. Both, too, are crossed in love—separated by untoward chance, from the object of their affections;—and both pass through a season of penury and almost want; and finally the love-suits of both are crowned with success.

The publication of the "Misérables" was an event, as many of us can very well remember. The power and pathos of the book were unmistakable. Vigour in the painting of the scenes, admirable effectiveness in narration, real vitality in the characters, intense sympathy with the down-trodden and suffering, a style such as no other contemporary, and but few writers of any other time could handle—when a novel possesses qualities like these, it is a very great novel. Here, as in the "Légende des Siècles," Victor Hugo was at his best. So every one read the book, and nearly every one admired it, and it flew into all lands upon the wings of many languages. When the publication was complete, on the 16th of September, 1862, M. Lacroix, the publisher, gave a grand banquet to the author at Brussels. Thither flocked liberal journalists and literary men from Paris, and writers from various quarters, and all was conviviality and congratulation.

But soon the busy worker was at work again. In the spring of 1864 appeared his book entitled "William Shakespeare"—a book, as Mr. Swinburne admits, that "throws more light on the greatest genius of our own century than on the greatest genius of the age of Shakespeare." And in good sooth the light it throws on the latter is scarcely blinding. But it shows what Victor Hugo himself had come to regard as the poet's mission. The

poet, as he here tells us, "for a truth, is a priest. There is but one pontiff here below,—genius." Whereupon, if we ask by what signs we are to recognise our spiritual pastors and masters, we are told that they are "the men who represent the total sum of the absolute realisable by man," that they attain to the "highest summit of the human spirit," "the ideal," where "they occupy thrones," and that their thoughts plunge into the abyss of the infinite. Alas, it was an evil day when Victor Hugo embraced these ecclesiastical opinions. Exile had served him well in many ways. It had forced him to concentrate himself on great work, as he had not done, latterly at least, amid the mental dissipations of Paris. But clearly brooding in solitude, and receiving the adulation of his own party, were not without danger. To few is it given in this world to pontificate with advantage, or even with impunity.

Meanwhile, during the publication of all these books, the snows of age were gathering on the poet's head. He had left France in 1851 a middle-aged man of forty-eight. In the autumn of 1865, when his next volume after "William Shakespeare" appeared, he had reached the riper age of sixty-two. But though the "Chansons des Rues et des Bois" ("The Songs of the Streets and the Woods") is thus not the production of a young man, yet it is, in the class of subjects treated, and the mode of treatment also, the most juvenile of the books written by Victor Hugo after he was out of his teens. "There is a certain moment of life," he says in the preface, "when . . . the desire to look back becomes irresistible. Our youth, dead in her beauty, reappears to us and insists on claiming

our thoughts." So the poet sings here of youth's light gossamer loves, the very thistledown of early passion—sings, though with less of sensuality, almost as Béranger had sung of Lisette—sings, though with less of real feeling, as Burns had sung of Bonnie Jean and Highland Mary. Does the singing sound false at all? is the reader inclined to ask; does the quavering falsetto of age mar the delivery of the notes? Why, no; one cannot fairly say that there is any defect of this kind. If the book were a young man's book, one would accept it as genuine enough, and have nothing but praise for the deft skill, the admirable craftsmanship of the versification. Our only feeling of incongruity comes from a knowledge that the writer must long have put away the childish things of which he speaks.

A novel comes next in the long roll of Victor Hugo's works, a novel with a short preface dated March, 1866. It is entitled "Les Travailleurs de la Mer" ("The Toilers of the Sea"), and the scene is laid partly in Guernsey and partly on a lone rock-reef amid the ever-boiling waters. Gilliatt and Déruchette are the hero and heroine—the latter a pretty piece of not very distinctive womanhood—the former a fine fellow, gifted with a strength of body and will beyond mortal. Poor Gilliatt! the fates were decidedly harsh to him. Why does Déruchette unwittingly and unintentionally win his heart by writing his name in the snow? Why, when her uncle's steamer is lost, does she—like any princess of romance sure of the inestimable value of her charms—proclaim that she will marry whomsoever rescues the wrecked vessel? Ought pretty girls to make such rash vows,

especially when they have no intention of keeping them? Vainly does Gilliatt go forth to the reef where the boat has been cast by the sea; vainly does he fight for long weeks against mechanical difficulties wellnigh insurmountable, against the weather's worst inclemencies, against hunger and thirst, against growing weakness, against a monstrous devil-fish of the deep, against the full fury of an Atlantic storm; vainly does he conquer all these, rescue the steamer's engine and bring it back single-handed to St. Sampson. When he presents himself, all weather-scarred and hacked with toil, before Déruchette, he finds that that young woman has, during his absence, given her heart to a pretty young clergyman. Hyperion to a satyr they stand before her. Gilliatt recognizes his defeat; magnanimously helps his rival to a somewhat unceremonious marriage; and suffers the sea to swallow him up just as the boat containing the bride and bridegroom dips below the horizon. An unhappy ending certainly. A man of this power might have done mankind some service. Pity so strong a craft should have foundered in the wake of a light little feather-brained pleasure-boat like Miss Déruchette. But such things have happened since the days of Solomon, and were possibly not even unknown before the reign of that wise monarch.

It were idle to declare that "Les Travailleurs de la Mer," notwithstanding some grand seascapes, and a kind of Titanic heroism in the principal character, is at all comparable with so majestic a work as "Les Misérables." But at least the world to which it introduces us is a sufficiently real world for all art purposes. The

secondary personages are quite possible—some even apparently sketched from actual life—and Gilliatt himself is a character that the world of fiction could ill spare. When, however, we come to Victor Hugo's next novel, "L'Homme qui rit" (the "Laughing Man"), published in 1869, we are carried to regions the like whereof were never trodden by human foot nor conceived by a healthy imagination. "The repulsiveness of the scheme of the story," says Mr. Louis Stevenson, "and the manner in which it is bound up with impossibilities and absurdities discourage the reader at the outset, and it needs an effort to take it as seriously as it deserves." Mr. Louis Stevenson is a critic from whom one differs with doubt—feeling that he may probably be right; but yet I confess to not seeing how such a book can deserve to be taken seriously at all. To me it is simply a preposterous, an impossible book. That Victor Hugo possessed no knowledge of the England of Queen Anne's day is abundantly clear. That his knowledge of the England of any day was of the most fantastic character scarcely needs formal proof. The historical names in this book are misspelt in a way that shows ignorance as well as carelessness. The English names which he invents for his imaginary characters, Lord Tom-Jim-Jack, Govicum, the pot-boy, Phelem-ghe-madone, the prize-fighter, Barkilphedro, the courtier-parasite, are names to excite derision. Whether Southwark was pronounced "Soudric" in Queen Anne's days, I don't know. It certainly is not pronounced "Sousouorc" now. Neither is "Fibi" or "Vinos" at all likely to convey to a French ear the sound of the English "Venus" or "Phœbe." Neither are Englishmen in

the habit of addressing God as "My Lord," though Victor Hugo gravely assures us that this is the case, and bases moral teachings on that form of address to the deity. Neither was a "wapen-take" a kind of superior policeman. Neither was James II. in any sense a "jovial" monarch. Nor, in short, does anything in this fantastic book bear any resemblance to anything that ever was or ever will be.

However, let us take the book out of the region of history and political purpose altogether, and regard it simply as a novel. Let us accept it as true that a king—James II. if you like—has, for eccentric purposes of his own, ordered a set of polyglot scoundrels to cut off a boy's lips, so that he shall wear an eternal grin upon his face; and then let us follow the boy's fortunes—his meeting with Dea, the little blind girl, with Ursus the kindly misanthropic tramp; his growth to manhood; his love for Dea; his love passages with Lady Josiane the virgin harlot; his recognition as a peer of the realm; his single speech to their lordships; his return to Ursus and Dea; and his death. Let us look at the persons he comes across in the course of his career. Can it be said that a single one of them lives? They all strut about in a galvanic sort of a manner certainly, and they all talk, and in exactly the same way. But does a single one of them live? Can one of them, with the single doubtful exception of Lady Josiane, be said to have a human character? And how many of the scenes possess even as much likelihood as is required for the purposes of fiction? Certainly not the sinking of the vessel containing the polyglot scoundrels aforesaid, nor the amazing

trial, nor the wonderful prize-fight in which foul blows are freely allowed. Of course there are striking scenes and pieces of literary art. A writer like Victor Hugo does not write a long book without showing signs of his power. Charles Reade held him to be the one great genius of this century, adding, however, that he sometimes had the nightmare. In "L'Homme qui rit" the nightmare decidedly predominates.

Place the book in thought, for a moment, beside Thackeray's "Esmond." Both relate to the same period of English history. The one reproduces faultlessly the spirit of that period, and makes the days of Queen Anne live for us again. The other, with far greater professions of accuracy and research, is an absurd caricature. Victor Hugo was the great romanticist of his time; Thackeray the great English classic of his generation. There were things that Victor Hugo could do magnificently, and that Thackeray could not touch. But in such comparison as this the Frenchman's work is "as the small dust of the balance," and kicks the beam. Place "L'Homme qui rit" beside "Esmond," and its unreality becomes doubly glaring.

The publication of "L'Homme qui rit" takes us to 1869, and therefore to the eve of Victor Hugo's re-entry into France. If we look back to the fourteen years of his sojourn in Guernsey, we shall see that they had been filled with excellent work. Indeed his pen had been so prolific as to leave me scant space for the chronicling of domestic events. This, however, is the less to be regretted, inasmuch as the years in question were, for the most part, barren of striking incident. Guernsey had been

like a haven of refuge after the storms in Paris, Brussels, and Jersey. Of the way of life at Hauteville House, a word has already been said. The morning was spent in work. At twelve came the French breakfast, or early lunch. Then there were long walks—for the poet was here an unwearied pedestrian, as he had always been when in Paris;—and many huntings about for bric-à-brac of various kinds; and billiards; and other forms of amusement. With the society of Guernsey, I was informed, locally, that the Hugos did not mix very much. Every Thursday a dinner was given to some of the poorest children in the island. Of course the poet paid the penalty of greatness in having an enormous correspondence. With the success of his books wealth had returned, and his well-known generosity tempted applicants from all quarters. Literary letters also flowed in upon him. Scarce a French author-aspirant who did not wish to submit his verse or prose to "the Master." Towards such "the Master" was not always quite ingenuous. It has been said of Lamartine, Victor Hugo, and George Sand, that the first answered young writers by saying, "Thank you, you are very good;" the second, "Thank you, you are very great;" and that the woman alone had sufficient candour to express an honest opinion on the productions submitted to her judgment. The bill is a true one. Victor Hugo's praises on such occasions were perfectly indiscriminate, and often—as in the case of M. Maxime du Camp—quite absurdly fulsome.

The years between 1856 and 1870 are marked by four events of capital importance in the domestic annals of

the Hugos—for it seems unnecessary to give any record here of summer trips to Brussels, Zealand, and elsewhere. It was during these years that François Hugo loved and lost a Guernsey girl to whom he was engaged, and greatly attached; that Adèle Hugo, much against her father's wish as I gather, married an English naval officer; and that Charles Hugo married, at Brussels, a ward of M. Jules Simon, the eminent orator, writer, and statesman. And it was on the 28th of August, 1868, and also at Brussels, that Madame Hugo bade to her husband and children her last farewell. She had asked to be buried beside her daughter, at Villequier.

So, amid the joys and sorrows that are common to the greatest as well as the least of men, did the years of the poet's exile wear to a close. But before passing on, it is only just to record the impression which he left on the mind of one who knew him well at this time:

"He was good enough," says M. Asseline, "to accept my friendship, and to give me his own in return. I was long his neighbour, and often his guest. We have travelled together.[1] With his sons he was ever radiant, the gayest, and most alert of us all. Everywhere, and at all times, I have seen him gracious and good,—I am describing him here as I have known him in the intimacy of private life, and such as he shows himself in his letters—kindly and indulgent to his own people, and full of good-will towards all. It is not right that future generations should only remember Victor Hugo as 'the Master,' the pontiff-king. There was also in him the man, the kindly relation, the friend, and in each of these characters he was most lovable."

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[1] All testimony is unanimous that he was the most delightful of travelling companions, uniformly good-tempered and ready to be pleased.

## CHAPTER XI.

IN August, 1870, the eyes of all the world were turned towards the frontier lands between Germany and France. At the news of the first disasters to the French arms, Victor Hugo left Guernsey and hurried to Brussels. Thither, in the first days of that terrible September, came tidings of the Emperor's capitulation at Sedan; and, on the 4th, the news of the revolution which had swept away the wreckage of the Empire, and established a Republic on the ruins. Victor Hugo might have returned to his native land in 1859, and again ten years afterwards; but though his son François had accepted the later amnesty, and had for some months been doing opposition journalistic work,[1] he had haughtily declared that, so long as Louis Napoleon held criminal sway, he should not deign to put his foot on French soil. Now, however, the way was open. The Empire was gone; the country in sore need. On the 5th he took the train from Brussels to Paris.

M. Claretie, the voluminous novelist, dramatist, journalist, who has just been made an Academician, accompanied the poet on this somewhat memorable journey,

[1] On the *Rappel*, in Paris.

and has told its incidents. He describes how Victor Hugo, wearing a soft felt hat, and carrying a small travelling bag slung across his shoulders, took his ticket for Paris—the very Mecca of all Frenchmen—with a very natural emotion; how he sat in the train watching for the first glimpse of the old loved country; how tears filled his eyes at the sight of some of Vinoy's defeated soldiers, and how he tried to cheer the poor worn-out wretches by shouts of "Vive la France! Vive l'Armée! Vive la Patrie!" Then the shades of evening began to gather, and it was ten o'clock before the train reached its destination. Charles Hugo was accompanying his father. But on the platform were François Hugo, and the poet's friends and disciples, M. Vacquerie and M. Paul Meurice. These raised a great shout of "Vive Victor Hugo!"—but there were wounded men in the train, and the shout was silenced;—to be taken up again, however, outside the station, by thousands upon thousands of throats, and to roll, like a great sea of acclamation, all along the way to Paul Meurice's house. "Never," says M. Alphonse Daudet, the novelist,—"never can I forget the sight as the carriage passed along the Rue Lafayette, Victor Hugo standing up and being literally borne along by the multitude."

So there was great and pardonable excitement, on either side, as the old man, whose vigour was still that of youth, came back among the people he loved so well; —and he spake to them words, not unfitting nor wanting in appropriate eloquence, on the duty of defending and saving Paris, and the immediate duty, above all, of being at unity among themselves.

But his words lost their magic when addressed to other than French hearts. As the ring of iron drew ever closer and closer round the doomed city, it occurred to him that he might with advantage address an appeal to the advancing Prussians. They, however, were scarcely in a mood to be moved by antithetical distinctions between the Empire and France's new government, still less to listen patiently to panegyrics of Paris as the place where "men learn to live," "the city of cities," "the city of men," the city occupying the position of pre-eminence formerly occupied by Athens and Rome,—the "centre" beside which "Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, Munich, and Stuttgart," were but as provincial capitals. When the beast that lurks in the dark places of our humanity is roused and roaring, no remembered services, however great, will appease his rage. Did not the people of Selkirk throw stones at Sir Walter Scott's carriage during the Reform agitation, and the populace of London break the Duke of Wellington's windows? Nay, within a very few months of the issue of this manifesto, was not Victor Hugo himself, when speaking in defence of the Communards, to have his hour of unpopularity among his own countrymen, and to be bitterly assailed and reviled, even by such approved liberals as M. Sarcey? Could it be reasonably expected that the Germans, who owed Victor Hugo nothing, should be stayed in the full rush of conquest by invidious comparisons between their own cities and Paris? They have somewhat to answer for in connection with the war. But that they took this manifesto very ill, and even suggested the propriety of "hanging the poet," can scarcely excite our wonder.

The poet, meanwhile, has decided to remain in the beleaguered city, and take his share in its perils. That he should be a personage there, or, indeed, anywhere, is a matter of course; and pieces from the "Châtiments" are freely recited for patriotic purposes, and one of the cannon presented to the city by the Society of Men of Letters is christened with his name. But he takes no very active part in such politics as are possible, and refuses to abet any revolutionary movement that might hamper the defence. As usual, he bears a brave heart, cheering all those about him by his gay endurance of the privations incident to a siege. He even wears the little military *képi* of the National Guard, incurring thereby the contempt of General Trochu, whose sneers he afterwards answers in kind. His sons are in Paris also, and his two infant grandchildren, Georges and Jeanne—of whom he is to write so often and so pathetically; and on the 1st of January, amid the flash of swords and the sparkle of bayonets, he takes to the little ones his new year's gift of toys. He wanders about the city a great deal, too, revisiting the old haunts so familiar in days of yore; and once, when musing in the place where the garden of the Feuillantines had been,—musing of his far-distant childhood, of his mother, of the wife he has lost,—a bombshell breaks in rudely upon his meditations. Anon the poor little baby Jeanne falls ill, for the unnatural diet tells heavily on infant life, and a great fear falls upon the grandfather's heart lest the child should die. He writes a good deal, of course, writes much of the verse that finds a place in the "Année terrible," published two years afterwards:

verse denunciatory of Louis Napoleon, and the Prussians, and kings, and priests, and full of patriotism; but inferior, as I venture to think, to the verse which he would have written, in less didactic days, on the terrible tragedy being enacted before his eyes. And all this while the weary weeks of the siege are crawling onwards, with hope now and again of some successful sortie, or of relief from without, and the persistent accumulated horrors of war, famine, and winter; and finally the dread certainty that everything is in vain, that General Trochu has no plan, has never had a plan, and that capitulation is inevitable.

So came the end; and on the 8th of February, 1871, elections were held, with Germany's consent, to determine whether poor France should drain the cup of war to the last dregs, or submit to be dismembered and despoiled. Victor Hugo was elected second on the list, with 214,169 votes, by the Department of the Seine, and reached Bordeaux, where the Assembly was to meet, on the 14th. Seldom has popular assembly had to decide on a more momentous issue, or been placed between the horns of a more dreadful, a more hideous dilemma.

Victor Hugo spoke in the Assembly itself three times, and in committee once. He spoke in favour of the continuance of the war, in favour of the deputies from Alsace and Lorraine retaining their seats in the Assembly, even after the cession of the two provinces; in favour of the retention of Paris as the seat of government; in favour of recognizing the election of Garibaldi, which it had been proposed to annul. The last speech was violently interrupted. Garibaldi's name was of an ill savour

in the Assembly. France, in her hour of anguish, had turned towards her rural gentry, and a great proportion of the members were royalists and good Catholics. To these Garibaldi's anti-clerical opinions were a stone of stumbling. Victor Hugo had already, in his first speech, offended their susceptibilities by ill-advised remarks on the Pope. When therefore he declared that Garibaldi "was the only general who had fought on the French side, and not been defeated," there arose a mighty hubbub,—in the midst of which he, then and there, resigned his seat.

Not an altogether dignified proceeding perhaps. If a man, however eminent, enters parliamentary life, he must accept its conditions. He can hardly expect a miscellaneous popular assembly to listen to him as the College of Cardinals listen to an allocution from the Papal chair. Though, however, Victor Hugo certainly exhibited some petulance on this occasion, yet it cannot be a matter of regret to his admirers that he abandoned a sphere for which he was not certainly now, if he ever had been, well fitted. His few speeches in the Assembly are sufficient to show how entirely he had become unfitted for practical politics.

This happened on the 8th of March. On the 13th, and just as he was about to take his departure from Bordeaux, a terrible calamity fell upon him. He had on that day invited a few friends to a farewell dinner. Charles Hugo was to be of the party, and started in a cab for the place of meeting. When the cab arrived, he was found to be dead, struck down by a fit of apoplexy. The father took the body of his son to Paris, and buried it there on the memorable 18th of

March, amid the first sputterings and mutterings of the horrible insurrection of the Commune,—buried it with funeral procession of promiscuous National Guards, and with insurgents on the barricades presenting arms to the dead. Then, on the 21st of March, he went on to Brussels to settle his son's affairs.

But not here, and not yet, was this stormy petrel of politics to find rest. From Brussels he watched, as may be supposed, with an intense absorbing interest—all Europe was watching it too—the outbreak of revolutionary passion in Paris. His sympathies, on the whole, were on the side of the Commune. Was not Paris the first city in the world? Was she not, above all other cities, entitled to govern herself? Was not the majority of the Assembly a majority of reactionists? Was it not their ineptitude that had goaded the people of Paris into revolution? Accordingly, though forced to admit that the movement, involving as it did a civil war almost within gunshot of the Germans, was at least inopportune, and though constrained to condemn many of the actions of the Communards, their murders and incendiarism, and the destruction of Napoleon's column, yet, as I have said, his sympathies were, on the whole, rather with them than with the party of order. So when they were defeated and ruthlessly punished, he lifted up a voice of protest. The Belgian Government had decided not to treat them as political refugees, but as the enemies of mankind, and to refuse them admittance into the country. He, on his side, declared, publicly and with pomp, in a letter to the *Indépendance Belge*, dated the 26th of May, that if any

escaped Communard came to his dwelling, "Place des Barricades, No. 4," he should be taken in and protected. This letter, not altogether unnaturally, exasperated the loyal Belgians. Some fifty of them collected, on the night of the 27th, before his house, and threw stones at the windows, and howled out their execrations; and on the 30th of May the Government, for the second time, intimated to him that he must go elsewhere. Accordingly, on the 2nd of June, he had made his way into Luxembourg.

But from this date, at last, something like comparative peace is reached. Of course a man like Victor Hugo, with his passionate convictions, keen interest in public affairs, and full assurance that he possesses a seer's foresight for the direction of mankind, is not likely to abandon politics altogether. In this same year, 1871, we find him refusing, ultra-liberal as he is, to accept an electoral mandate, but presenting himself once more, and this time unsuccessfully, as a candidate for re-election to the Assembly; and on the 30th of January, 1876, he is elected to the Senate. But practically, after June, 1871, his career as an active politician is over. If he still writes and speaks in favour of the amnesty, the necessity of making Paris once more the capital of France, and other matters political and social, he does so as a publicist only, and not as a militant party man. More and more, as the end draws near, does he withdraw from the arena.

But still he wrote apace. Many poets of renown have not, in their whole lives, written as much as he published between 1872 and 1885, that is, between his

seventieth and eighty-third years. The volumes during that period followed one another so rapidly that it is scarcely possible for the epitomizing biographer to do more than barely catalogue their titles. First, on the 20th of April, 1872, appeared "L'Année Terrible," to which I have already referred, using it as a record of the poet's life during the siege. It is dedicated "to Paris, the Capital of the Nations." Next, on the 20th of February, 1874, came out his last novel, "Quatre-vingt Treize" ("Ninety-three"). This was written mainly during a season of retirement at Guernsey, and may occupy a place among his books by the side of the "Travailleurs de la Mer," and far above "L'Homme qui rit." The story is comparatively simple. A republican battalion—we are, as the title of the book implies, in 1793—has found in the woods of the Vendée a poor woman and her three children, and has taken the children into its affection. The children are captured by the royalists, and the mother is wounded and left for dead. Then the royalists in turn are defeated, and take refuge in a castle, where they are besieged, and in sore straits. Whereupon they offer to give up the three children if allowed by the besiegers to go forth safe and sound;—otherwise the children will be burnt. This is a bargain which the attacking party, notwithstanding the love they bear to the little things, cannot accept, and the assault begins. It is of a terrible character. The royalists are killed one by one, all except their Marquis-chief, who is wonderfully saved through a sort of moving stone in the wall. The last man left, as he is dying, musters his remaining strength to light the slow match which is

to set fire to the tower on the bridge in which the children are confined. Nothing can save them. The flames are flickering up in long tongues, higher, higher, higher, from the lower storey. Suddenly the mother, who has recovered from her wound, and for long days has been looking for her children, appears on the scene with a lamentable cry:

> "The figure they saw there was no longer Michelle Fléchard, it was a Gorgon. Those who are miserable are formidable. The peasant woman was transfigured into one of the Eumenides. This commonplace village wife, vulgar, ignorant, incapable of thought, had suddenly acquired the epic proportions of despair. Great sorrows are a gigantic enlarging of the soul; this mother now represented maternity; everything that epitomizes humanity is superhuman; she stood there, on the border of that ravine, before that conflagration, before that crime, like some sepulchral power; she had the cry of a beast, and the gesture of a goddess; her visage, from which curses proceeded, seemed like a flaming mask. Nothing could be more sovereign than the lightning that flashed from her tear-drowned eyes; her look cast thunderbolts on the conflagration."

Her anguish is so terrible that it excites compassion even in the iron heart of the escaped royalist chief, still lurking in the adjacent woods. He returns to the castle with the key of the tower, saves the children, and is, of course, taken. The republican chief, who happens to be his nephew, does not, however, consider that he ought to be guillotined as the consequence of an act of humanity, and allows him to go free. Whereupon the nephew is himself guillotined by order of a delegate from the Convention, who has educated him, and loves him with a passionate love. As his head falls, the delegate shoots a bullet through his own heart.

Now, of course, it must at once be apparent that such a story demands certain concessions on the reader's part. He must, for instance, be prepared to take for granted the probability that three little peasant children should acquire an importance so disproportionate in the contest between bodies of armed men. He must further be ready to accept it as likely that the royalists would, out of the merest wantonness—for at that stage their own fate was sealed—do their best to burn the pretty little creatures. He must also make up his mind to receive, with as much confidence as he can command, a good deal of quasi-history. And if he further thinks that the mother would be a more pathetic figure if less purely animal, I, for one, shall not blame him. But, having once made these concessions and reserves, he will be a reader difficult to please if he does not admit that the fighting in the book is done in a masterly way, that the description of the children at their play in the tower is a pretty, smiling, happy picture of childhood; and that the book generally, though now and then, as in the passage quoted, somewhat thunderous in style, is yet full of passages of striking graphic prose.

Passing by Victor Hugo's rather pompous account of his two sons, given as an introduction to Charles Hugo's "Hommes de l'Exil," published in October, 1874, we come next to the three volumes of "Actes et Paroles" ("Deeds and Words"), published respectively in May, 1875, November, 1875, and July, 1876. These volumes contain his utterances on public matters between 1841 and 1851, 1852 and 1870, 1870 and 1876—all utterances of capital importance to the biographer, but with

which the reader need not here be detained. For on the 26th of February, 1877, we come to what should interest him more, to the issue of a new series of the "Légende des Siècles."

Are these two volumes, then, equal to the two volumes published eighteen years before? Hardly. As time went on, the habit of preaching had grown terribly on the poet. He did it not only in his speeches, where the preaching may have been admissible, and in his prose, where it might have been spared, but in his verse, which at last it almost drowned. He had preached a great deal, a very great deal, in "L'Année Terrible." He preached a great deal in these two later volumes of the "Légende des Siècles;" and in "Le Pape," published in April, 1878, and "La Pitié Suprême," published in February, 1879, and "Religions et Religion," published in April, 1880, and "L'Âne," published in October, 1880, he may be said to have done nothing but preach. When, however, in the volumes of the "Légende" now immediately before us, he condescends to leave the pulpit and to become once more the minstrel, the teller of stories, the poet, then all his old skill comes back to him, and he is the Hugo whom no one can approach. Beside the masterpieces of the first series one can place, for power and weird horror, "L'Aigle du Casque" ("The Eagle on the Helmet"), the story of the unequal combat between Tiphaine the hardened warrior and Angus the stripling, and of the fierce chase of the latter through the woods—and then of the punishment inflicted on Tiphaine for his misdeeds by the bronze eagle upon his helm. Nor, for pathos, does the earlier

series contain a story more touching than the story of "Petit Paul" ("Little Paul"), the poor motherless child whose father marries again, whose grandfather takes the mother's place, and then dies also, leaving the helpless three-years mite doubly forlorn, forsaken, misused, until one winter night he strays out to the churchyard where his grandfather lies, and is found sleeping the sleep that has no earthly morrow. Two battle pieces also, "Jean Chouan," and "Le Cimetière d'Eylau" ("The Cemetery of Eylau"), the latter full of musketry-crash and cannon music—these should be mentioned as equal to the poet's best. Why, why in the days of isolation and comparative solitude, in Jersey and Guernsey, had it ever been borne in upon him that he had a prophet's mission? Why did he not rest content with the poet's laurel?

Of the books just enumerated I do not propose to say very much. "Le Pape" is constructed upon a most ingenious plan. The poet-pontiff supposes that the real Pope dreams a dream, and in that dream delivers Victor Hugo's philosophy *ex cathedrâ* to whomsoever will hear. Pope and anti-Pope thus exchanging sentiments—the idea is a happy one. In "La Pitié Suprême" the poet surveys all history, and expresses his compassion at once for wicked kings and suffering peoples. In "Religions et Religion" he demonstrates the futility of all dogmatic teaching, and preaches a pure deism—the belief in a vague being, whose "solstice" is "Conscience," whose "axis" is "Justice," whose "equinox" is "Equality," whose "vast sunrise" is "Liberty." In "L'Âne," a very learned ass explains to philosopher Kant, at some

considerable length, that human knowledge comes to very little—a position which Kant is finally constrained to admit. Whereupon the poet epiloguises, and assures Kant that all things, even evil things, are working for good.

Three other books of verse did this most prolific writer produce.[1] "L'Art d'Être Grandpère" ("The Art of Being a Grandfather"), published in May, 1877; "Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit" ("The Four Winds of the Spirit"), published in June, 1881; and "Théâtre en Liberté," published in 1886, after his death. Over each of these one might willingly linger. The last is a book of plays not intended for the stage. The "Quatre Vents de l'Esprit" is a really important work, divided into four books—satirical, dramatic, lyrical, and epic—and containing poems of very diverse value. "L'Art d'Être Grandpère" is a monument of the old man's tenderness for his two grandchildren, and a book of singular grace. In what does the "art of being a grandfather" consist? does the reader ask? In being full of love, and delicate sympathy, and undeviating indulgence, Victor Hugo would reply. To the father is committed the rod of discipline. *He* may have to be occasionally stern. But the grandfather—no such harsh duty is his. He may give the little folks all they ask for, may gratify their every whim, may carry jam to them in moments of penitential retirement, may spoil them to his heart's content. It is his privilege, his joy; and if any one ventures to ask whether such a mode of education be the best devisable, he has his answer ready:

[1] It is said that there are a great many more in MS. and to be published.

Have sterner methods succeeded very well in the education of mankind? Whereupon one trusts that Master Georges and Miss Jeanne were unspoilable, and felt the exceeding beauty of the love which their grandfather lavished upon them.

And who would churlishly have begrudged to the old man the happiness which he derived from the constant society of these two children? His own children were all now gone, for François Hugo had died in Paris, after a long illness, on the 26th of December, 1873, and his daughter was divided from him by the terrible separation of insanity. What wonder if his heart went out to these last scions of his race—if he watched them, treasured their little sayings and doings, played with them, told them his beautiful stories, drew pictures for them, was a child again in their company?

Nor must it be supposed that the last years of this great man's life were anything but bright and happy. In December, 1871, on his return to Paris, he took apartments at No. 66, Rue de la Rochefoucauld, whence he removed, in 1873, to No. 21, Rue de Clichy.[1] Here he lived with Madame Charles Hugo, and his two dear grandchildren; and Madame Drouet lived there, too, doing the honours of the salon, in which he received his friends and admirers. These, as may be supposed, flocked thither. The place became the rendezvous of all

[1] In 1878 he was driven away from the Rue de Clichy by the importunity of visitors, and went to live in a quieter place, No. 130, Avenue d'Eylau, near the Bois de Boulogne. Madame Charles Hugo married M. Lockroy, the Deputy, and lived with Georges and Jeanne next door. Madame Drouet died two or three years before the poet.

that was greatest in literary France. For upwards of forty years the man had been the foremost writer in his country, one may even say the foremost poet in the world. During nineteen of those years he had been an exile in a cause which was now triumphant. Everything conspired to exalt him and do him honour. His plays were revived amid universal enthusiasm. His earlier books were spoken of with reverence, the new received with an almost-unanimity of praise. Nor, amid all this passion of admiration, did he pretermit the literary toil in which he took such keen pleasure. As he had laboured in Jersey and Guernsey, so he laboured amid the distractions of Paris, neither hindered by the claims of society and attendance at the Senate, nor with brain in aught beclouded, nor hand made weaker by old age. Old age! Until quite at the last he never seems to have felt its touch. As one reads the record of his secretary, M. Lesclide, one is simply amazed at the man's marvellous vitality. He might be a young fellow of twenty for the things he does and the energy he displays. He never wears a great coat; he never carries an umbrella. His favourite form of relaxation is riding on the top of an omnibus. He goes up in a balloon—a kind of amusement which Madame Drouet by no means enjoys. He is fond of little excursions in the environs of Paris, and is on such occasions the blithest of companions, as frolic as a boy, pleased with everything, the scenery, the flowers, the fare at the inn, all the little incidents of the day. Well may M. de Banville say that he is younger in these later times than he had been at thirty. At thirty he was writing of "Autumn Leaves," and singing "Songs of the

Twilight." Now, with life near its end, he is full of peace, looking death cheerfully in the face, confident in the hope of a world beyond the grave; and ardent, too, in his faith that a happier age is dawning for mankind.

So does a serene and beautiful light linger upon the evening of his day of life. When one remembers how sadly the careers of such men as Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Alfred de Musset, wore to a close—how painful are the concluding chapters of most biographies—one can, I think, but be glad that a great man should thus live greatly to the end.

For now death at last struck the fatal blow. The poet was not to have his wish, and dandle a child of Jeanne upon his knee. On May 13, 1885, he seems to have caught a chill during one of his omnibus rides. Heart and lungs became affected. He suffered greatly, and wished for the end. On the 22nd that wish was answered. His last word, his last conscious act, were for his grandchildren.

In a memorandum given by the poet some few months before to his friend M. Vacquerie, he had said, "I give 50,000 francs to the poor. I wish to be taken to the grave in their hearse. I refuse the prayers of all churches. I ask for a prayer from every human soul. I believe in God." Such were his scant directions as to his own obsequies. But the country felt at once that its great dead ought to be buried with all national honour. He had been the foremost poet, not only of France, but of his generation. On the Republic he had very special claims, as having been her champion in evil days, and having suffered on her behalf loss of fortune and exile. So a

public funeral was fittingly decreed, and the Government decreed also that the Panthéon,—that edifice of many vicissitudes, where Mirabeau and Marat had lain for awhile, and Rousseau and Voltaire,—should be unchurched once more to receive him. Accordingly, on the morning of May 31st, the body was placed beneath the Arc de Triomphe, in a coffin palled with black and silver and royal purple, and lay there in state till the following day when it was borne to its last home, in a pauper's hearse indeed, but otherwise with such pomp, such a mighty procession, such signs of national mourning, such votive wreaths from every land, as Paris itself had scarcely seen since the day of Napoleon's funeral.[1]

[1] Victor Hugo's personal estate in England alone was sworn under £92,000, and he had real property in Guernsey besides. Nearly all his money is said to have been invested in foreign (not French) funds.

## CHAPTER XII.

ON February 26, 1880—that is on his seventy-eighth birthday—Victor Hugo wrote a preface for the collected edition of his writings. It is a short preface, and in it there occurs the following passage :

> "Of the value of the sum of work here presented, time alone can decide. But this at least is already certain, and satisfies the author, that in our own day, in the present tumult of opinions, amid the violence of existing prejudices, and notwithstanding all passions, anger, and hatred, there is no reader, be he who he may, who, if he is himself worthy of respect, will lay down the book without respecting the author."

This is a proud claim to be inscribed, as it were, over the very portal of the edifice reared by the writer's genius. It fronts us there. We cannot pass it by. Let us endeavour to meet it quite honestly.

Respect, respect—why should any of us have to pause for a moment, doubting, before he gives a reply to the challenge? No one would hesitate if similarly challenged on behalf of Scott. Why does not the assent come so readily, so universally in the case of Victor Hugo?

For this reason—that, if one examines his life at all minutely, it is scarcely possible to avoid the conclusion

that the facts do not always agree with his presentation of them, and further, that the differences have at least a look of being designed so as to add to his prestige and glory. Here at once we are met by something that checks respect, inasmuch as it needs explanation. How shall we explain it? In the partly analogous cases of Goethe and Shelley, apologists have said, and said truly, that the poet often sees things differently from other men, that he sees them surrounded by a haze of imagination, in which their real outlines are blurred and lost, and that, as regards past events especially, he sees his remembered feelings in connection with them rather than the events themselves. To the full benefit of such an excuse Victor Hugo is clearly entitled. Though he claimed for himself a memory of extraordinary and minute accuracy, yet there seems no doubt that that faculty sometimes played him tricks, especially when matters affecting himself were involved. Why, for instance, should he have alleged that M. Piétri, one of Louis Napoleon's myrmidons, had offered 25,000, and even 50,000, francs for his capture alive or dead? Had he not brooded over the importance of the capture till he imagined the reward?

The poetic vision will not, however, I fear, account for all that here needs explanation. The fact is, and one says it sadly, there was a strong element of theatricality about the man. Great as he was, he liked to appear greater. His statements about himself, his surroundings, the events in which he had himself taken part, bear often the same proportion to fact that the stage bears to real life. They lack the simplicity of truth. They are, in effect, false. There, the murder is out! and if there be any

one who cannot esteem a character tainted with theatricality, why then he must leave Victor Hugo unhonoured.

But I, for one, shall not agree with him. Behind the actor in Victor Hugo there was a man, and a great man—a man, in his private life, simple, genial, kindly, and in his public life fulfilled with passionate convictions, for which he was prepared to battle and to suffer. In the essential heart of him, he was genuine enough. The theatricality, the vainglory, were of the surface.

And what were the opinions which, from the year 1849 onwards, had seized so fast a hold on his whole being? Substantially they were the opinions of Rousseau, as held by Robespierre. Man, according to these theorists, was originally good, kindly, beneficent. If he seemed to be something different it was because he had been deformed by vicious institutions—the rule of kings, the inventions of priests, the tyranny of aristocracies, the pressure of iniquitous laws. Once remove these evil influences, and he would at once go back to a state of nature, which was a state of excellence. Once let the Rights of Man prevail, and those rights would be exercised in the most unselfish and excellent manner. The voter would invariably vote according to his conscience, and with a single eye to the general good. The ruler would rule simply as the voters' delegate, and for the common advantage. Man all over the world would be the brother of man, wars would cease, property be equalized, and everybody, according to the pleasant old saying, live happy ever after.

And because the French Revolution had done so much to clear away pre-existing institutions, and to give man an entirely unencumbered piece of high tableland on

which to rear the edifice of the future, therefore Victor Hugo felt for the French Revolution a boundless love and veneration. He is never weary of singing its praises. He returns to the subject with an added zest on every possible opportunity. The "French Revolution," he tells us, for instance, "is the mightiest step taken by the human race since Christ. It is the consecration of humanity." "It was an immense act of probity." "It was nothing else than the ideal bearing the sword, . . . and closing the portals of evil, and opening the portals of good." "It promulgated truth." "It may be said to have created man over again, by giving him a second soul, a sense of right." It rendered all savage upheavals of the masses for ever impossible—this was written before the outbreak of the Commune,—and, in short, it was a movement quite marvellous and miraculous in its beneficent effects.

And if the movement itself had such a transcendent character, the actors in it were no less heroic. Michelet, the historian, asseverates, in his somewhat wild way, that the Assembly that nominally governed France during the Reign of Terror was "a majestic assembly, sovereign among all assemblies, founding, organising, representing, above any other human force, the inexhaustible fecundity of nature." Victor Hugo, not to be outdone, says of this Assembly—an Assembly, be it remembered, chiefly remarkable for grotesque ineptitude and cowardice—that it was to all other representative bodies what the Himalayas are to other mountains.

But how, indeed, could he be expected to speak otherwise? For had not this Assembly helped to found "the

Republic," and was not "the Republic" the fetish of his later years? No cavalier, in the good old days, can ever have believed more passionately in the divine right of kings than he believed in the divine right of this particular form of government. It was not, in his mind, a government like any other, applicable or not applicable in a given case, according to a country's history, traditions, circumstances—a government which any country, by the exercise of its volition, might accept or reject at will. It was a government of right as opposed to wrong, a something supreme and absolute, which it would have been blasphemy even to question, a universal panacea for every ill to which political or social man is heir. It meant the realised ideal for which the Revolution had prepared,—"the end of prostitution for woman, the end of starvation for man, the end of night for the child." It meant "brotherhood, concord, dawn." It meant universal peace, and universal benevolence, and the extinction of poverty, and a regenerated world.

Now to all this philosophy of the eighteenth century, and the political and social theories founded upon it, there is but one word to apply, and that word is, "obsolete." They tottered to their fall under Burke's attack, and from the date when Darwin published his great work they became things of the past. As soon as the idea of development had taken possession of men's minds, it became difficult for any really serious thinker to regard man apart from his history, and as a creature originally beneficent and good, and only led into evil by pernicious laws and institutions. Man has grown to be what he is, grown by slow, patient effort, prolonged from

generation to generation, grown by the help of the very institutions which the eighteenth century regarded as the origin of all his woes. He is not, as Rousseau and his school held, a kind of abstract being, under the exclusive guidance of his intellect, who can be divorced from every influence of the past, and trusted to be always reasonable. His past forms part of himself, and his reasonableness mainly depends upon it. Carry him back to a "state of nature," in his remotest days, and you carry him back to the state of the savage, and even worse. Behind the savage there is the brute, far enough removed in history, but lurking all too near to the heart of each one of us, and easily roused, and with difficulty appeased. How idle to suppose that he can be suppressed by cancelling all that has taken place since he held undisputed sway!

And with the crumbling of Rousseau's worm-eaten philosophy, the French Revolution assumes its right proportions as a movement in which the brute in man played an all too important part. The history of 1793 has been re-written for us lately, with an almost superabundance of detail, by M. Taine. It is scarcely a history over which one feels inclined to join in Victor Hugo's hosannas.

While as to "the Republic"—why "the Republic" is a good form of government enough under certain condi tions. It is a better form of government doubtless than the Empire; for it has possibilities of continued life—and those the Empire never had. But even in France, which Victor Hugo held to be the vanguard of the nations—even in Paris, which he considered to be the Holy City of the human race,—can it be said that even there "the Republic" has brought in its train all the blessings he

anticipated? Is woman's purity more conspicuously honoured there than elsewhere? Is man less subject to poverty and the other ills of life? Is the child treated so exceptionally well? The government of France is doubtless doing its best under difficult conditions. But can we as yet regard it as showing to all governments a brilliant example of "brotherhood" and "concord"? Can it be said to have its being in a rose-flush of perpetual "dawn"?

So I fear that Victor Hugo's claim to be considered as a prophet must be rejected, somewhat sadly. In truth, he was, in one sense, but a "laudator temporis acti." The doctrines which he preached in politics, social philosophy, and religion, were but the Gospel according to Jean Jacques, as Carlyle called it in derision, the Gospel of Rousseau, as it had taken shape in 1793. Apart from the cry for heads, he was the intellectual continuator of Robespierre. From that old wind-withered tree what fruit could be gathered for the healing of the nations?

But, very fortunately for mankind, the truth or falsehood of a great writer's systematised opinions is no measure of the value of his work. Pictures of the most superb power may be painted on very indifferent canvas, just as immortal music may be allied to words that are almost meaningless. Who thinks of Godwin's poor thin philosophy when watching the unearthly pageant of "Prometheus Unbound," and listening to the enchanted verbal harmonies of Shelley's verse? And similarly, we can disregard Victor Hugo's political system, and consider him only as a poet and a prose writer; and then, if he be not a delight to us, the fault is ours.

Of course, in the enormous mass of his work, there is much that is unequal. His early writings are those of a child. His later writings are often marred by didacticism and tricks of manner. What I have ventured to call the theatrical element in his character not unfrequently gives to his prose and verse a tone of exaggeration, unreality, and violence. But in considering the place he holds in literature, all such faults may fitly be brushed to one side. He should be judged by his best, and that best is not only immense in quantity, but of a quality so excellent that the critic experiences some trouble in adequately speaking of it without falling into what may seem to be hyperbole.

As a novelist he holds rank with the highest. There are two of his books, at least, which the world will not easily let die. One of them, "Nôtre Dame de Paris," has been published now for fifty-seven years; the other, "Les Misérables," for upwards of a quarter of a century. Neither, whatsoever M. Zola may say, has at all waxed old. There is in each a salt of genius which will for ever preserve it from decay. Vivid powers of description, admirable skill as a narrator, the faculty of creating real characters, and interesting us in their fortunes, the power of marshalling their actions to definite ends, pathos, passion, a noble intolerance of wrong and a style of marvellous richness and brilliancy—all these he displayed in "Nôtre Dame" and "Les Misérables." What more would you have? They hold an honourable place in the permanent literature of the world.

As a dramatist he takes rank, if not with the very highest, if not on that unapproachable peak where

Shakespeare dwells alone, yet high upon the spurs of the great mountain. Here, again, he displayed excellent gifts of invention, and also a real playwright's instinct for what is scenic and effective. Working for the stage, he adapted himself to its conditions, and succeeded in making an audience accept plays that were in a high sense literature. Then too in his dramas there was room for the display of his supreme gift, his gift as a poet.

And that he was a poet, and a great poet, who shall be bold to question? Speaking lately, in the preface to a dictionary of Victor Hugo's similes, M. Coppée[1] says—

> "Among all the poets of mankind Victor Hugo is the one who has invented the greatest number of similes, and those the best carried out, the most striking, the most magnificent. . . . He is the greatest lyric poet of all ages."

Without quite endorsing these superlatives, one may at least claim for him a place in the very first rank of the world's singers. The mere enumeration of the points at which he touched the highest excellence is itself eloquent. As a song writer he has had few equals. His songs have the essential lyric qualities, spontaneous tunefulness, light delicacy of touch,—all that we are accustomed to associate with the flutter and warble of a bird. As a satirist he is direct, trenchant, terrible, a swordsman whose weapon draws blood at every stroke. As a writer of reflective verse—I am not speaking here of the didactic work of his later life—he is weighty and impressive, and, amid all his philosophising, remains a poet. As a narrator, he is singularly lucid and striking, and possesses to the full

[1] In my judgment the foremost living French poet.

the story-teller's gift of awakening and retaining interest. By turns sublime and playful, roughly strong and daintily delicate, full of love-passion and a sweet, fatherly tenderness,—he seems to touch at will all the organ stops in our nature. And what regal command over rhymes, rhythms, and metre! what a rich verbal palette! what superb freedom of power in its use! His words are as pigments, and as pigments, if that were conceivable, which appeal to the ear as well as to the eye. They seem to give out at once colour and sound.

Ah, he was more than the prophet or apostle of a narrow sect. And when time has done its worst and best with his work—has disintegrated the quartz and washed away the clay—there will remain a treasure of gold, without which mankind would be appreciably the poorer. He was one of the world's great poets, and his verse will continue through the after-time as a living force, because, while perfect in workmanship, it is broad-based upon the universal human heart, and so eternal.

THE END.

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——Una Voce de Guernesey, ossia la battaglia di Mentana, recato in versi Italiani da M. Consigli, col testo a fronte. *Fr.* and *Ital.* Livorno, 1868, 12mo.

Les Voix Intérieures. Paris, 1837, 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1840, 8vo.

——Les Voix Intérieures; Les Rayons et les Ombres. Paris, 1841, 12mo.

——Les Voix Intérieures — Les Rayons et les Ombres. Paris, 1879, 8vo.

### III. PROSE WORKS.

Actes et paroles, 1870-1871-1872. Paris, 1872, 8vo.

Actes et paroles. (Avant l'Exil, 1841-1851. — Pendant l'Exil, 1852-70.—Depuis l'Exil, 1870-1876.) Paris, 1875, 76, 8vo.

L'Archipel de la Manche. Paris, 1883, 8vo.

Le Beau Pécopin et la Belle Bauldour [from "Le Rhin"]. Edition spéciale pour la France [with a preface signed: P. J. Stahl, *pseud—i.e.*, Pierre Jules Hetzel]. Paris, 1855, 16mo.

Bug-Jargal, par l'Auteur de Han d'Islande. Paris, 1826, 12mo.
Appeared originally in the *Conservateur Littéraire*, Nos. 11-15, and signed M. Rearranged and much enlarged, it was published in book form. The name of the author appears in the third edition, 1829.

——Bug-Jargal—Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné—Claude Gueux. Paris, 1845, 12mo.

——The Slave-King. From the Bug Jargal. (*Library of Romance*, ed. Leitch Ritchie, vol. vi.) London, 1833, 12mo.

——The Noble Rival, or the Prince of Congo. London [1845], 8vo.

——The Slave-King; a historical account of the Rebellion of the Negroes in St. Domingo. Adapted from the "Bug-Jargal" of V. H. (*Parlour Library*, vol. lxxi.). London, 1852, 8vo.

——Jargal. A Novel. Translated from the French by C. E. Wilbour. With illustrations by J. A. Beaucé. New York, 1866, 8vo.

Œuvres inédites. Choses Vues. Paris, 1887, 8vo.

——Things Seen. [Translated from the French.] 2 vols. London, 1887, 8vo.

Claude Gueux. Paris, 1834, 8vo.
Appeared originally in the *Revue de Paris*, vol. vii., 1834, pp. 5-29.

——Capital Punishment. Claude Gueux. [Translated from the French, by D. Pyrke, junior.] London, 1865, 8vo.

Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné. Paris, 1829, 12mo.
Two other editions appeared the same year.

——Another edition. Paris, 1840, 8vo.

——Another edition. Precédé de Bug-Jargal. Paris, 1841, 12mo.

——Another edition. Suivi de Claude Gueux. Vingt dessins par Gavarni et Andrieux. Paris, 1877, 4to.

——The last days of a Condemned, from the French of V. H. [Translated] with observations on Capital Punishment, by Sir P. H. Fleetwood. London, 1840, 12mo.

——Another edition. Translated by G. W. M. Reynolds. London, 1840, 12mo.

——Under Sentence of Death; or, a Criminal's Last Hours. Together with, Told under Canvas and Claude Gueux. Translated by Sir G. Campbell, Bart. London [1886], 8vo.
One of "Ward & Lock's Royal Library of choice books of famous authors."

Étude sur Mirabeau. Paris, 1834, 8vo.

Mes Fils. [F. V. and C. Hugo. A biographical sketch.] Quatrième édition. Paris, 1874, 8vo.

Han d'Islande. 4 vols. Paris, 1823, 12mo.

——Seconde édition. 4 vols. Paris, 1823, 12mo.

——Troisième édition. 4 vols. Paris, 1829, 12mo.

——Another edition. 2 vols. Paris, 1833, 8vo.

——Another edition. 2 tom. Paris, 1875, 8vo.

—— Nouvelle édition illustrée. Paris, 1885, 4to.

——Hans of Iceland. [Translated from the French. With etchings by G. Cruikshank.] London, 1825, 16mo.

——Hans of Iceland; or, the Demon Dwarf. [Translated from the French.] London [1845], 8vo.

——The Outlaw of Iceland; a romance. Translated by Sir G. Campbell. London, 1885, 8vo.

Histoire d' un Crime. 2 vols. Paris, 1877-8, 8vo.

——New edition, illustrated. Paris, 1879, 4to.

——The History of a Crime; the testimony of an Eye-Witness. Translated by T. H. Joyce and A. Locker. 4 vols. London, 1877-78, 8vo.

——Another edition. London, 1886 [1885], 8vo.

John Brown. [An anonymous sketch of the career of John Brown, hanged Dec. 2, 1859, for inciting the Virginian slaves to insurrection; and containing 2 letters from V. H., the first asking for the pardon of John Brown, the second giving permission to Mr. Chenay to engrave his design of J. Brown, with a lithographed fac-simile of this letter, etc.] Paris, 1861, 8vo.

L'Homme qui rit. 4 tom. Paris, 1869, 8vo.

——Another edition. [Illustrations by Daniel Vierge.] Paris [1877], 4to.

——By Order of the King. The authorised English translation of V. H.'s L'Homme qui rit. [By Mrs. A. C. Steele.] With illustrations by S. L. Fildes. 3 vols. London, 1870, 8vo.

——By the King's Command. [Translated from the French work entitled: "L'Homme qui rit."] London, 1875, 8vo.

——By the King's Command. London [1876], 8vo.

One of a series entitled "Favourite Authors, British and Foreign."

——By Order of the King. London, 1886 [1885], 8vo.

Littérature et philosophie mêlées. 2 vols. Paris, 1834, 8vo.

Les Misérables. 10 tom. Paris, 1862, 8vo.

——Another edition. [Illustrated by photographs from drawings by G. Brion.] 10 tom. Bruxelles, 1862, 8vo.

——Nouvelle édition, illustrée par Brion. Paris, 1864, 4to.

——Nouvelle édition, illustrée. 5 vols. Paris, 1879, 4to.

——Les Misérables, principaux épisodes de. Edited by J. Boïelle. 2 vols. London, 1885-1886, 8vo.

——Les Misérables. Authorised English Translation [from the French, by Sir F. C. L. Wraxall,

Bart.] 3 vols. London, 1862, 8vo.

——Les Misérables (The Wretched). A new translation, revised. 5 pts. Richmond [Virginia], 1863-64, 8vo.

——Les Misérables. Authorised copyright English translation [by Sir F. C. L. Wraxall, Bart.]. Fourth edition, revised [and abridged]. London [1864], 8vo.

——Les Misérables. Jean Valjean. [Translated from the French.] London [1876], 8vo.

——Les Misérables. Translated from the French by C. E. Wilbour. London, 1887, 8vo.

One of "Routledge's Sixpenny Novels."

——Les Misérables [abridged]. Authorised English translation [by Sir F. C. L. Wraxall, Bart.]. With illustrations. London [1879], 8vo.

——Les Misérables. Fantine (Cosette and Marius). A Romance. [An abridged translation of pts. 1-3.] London, 1874, 8vo.

——The Battle of Waterloo. [Translated from vol. iii. of the work entitled "Les Misérables."] New York, 1863, 8vo.

——Gavroche: the Gamin of Paris. From "Les Misérables." Translated and adapted by M. C. Pyle. [With illustrations.] Philadelphia [1872], 8vo.

Napoléon le Petit. Londres, 1852, 8vo.

——Nouvelle édition. Londres, 1862, 16mo.

——Édition illustrée. Paris, 1879, 4to.

——Napoleon the Little. Second edition. London, 1852, 8vo.

One of a series entitled "Contemporary French Literature."

——Napoleon the Little. (Authorised version.) Third edition. London, 1852, 8vo.

One of a series entitled "Contemporary French Literature."

Notre Dame de Paris. 2 vols. Paris, 1831, 8vo.

Exceedingly rare. Eleven hundred copies were printed, and composed the first four editions. A smaller edition in 4 vols., 12mo, was published the same year with the same text, but containing four vignettes, two more than the 8vo edition. This edition comprised 2000 copies, and furnished the 5th, 6th, and 7th editions. The 8th, Paris, 1832, 8vo, in 3 vols., which contains a new preface and three new chapters, viz. — *Impopularité*, *Abbas beati Martini*, *Ceci tuera cela*, is really the second edition, and forms vols. iii.-v. of the first collective edition of the "Œuvres de Victor Hugo; Romans," published by Renduel.

——Another edition. (*Illustrations Littéraires.*) Bruxelles [1835 ?], 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1836, 8vo.

This edition is illustrated with 12 plates designed by Boulanger, Alfred and Tony Johannot, Raffet, Rogier, and Rouarge, and engraved on steel by Lacour, the Brothers Finden, etc. An edition in 3 vols., with the same plates, was published the same year.

——Édition illustrée d'après les dessins de E. de Beaumont, L. Boulanger, Daubigny, etc. Paris, 1844, 8vo.

Contains 55 steel engravings, and a large number of wood-cuts.

——Édition illustrée de soixante-dix dessins par Brion, gravures de Yon et Perrichon. Paris, 1865, 8vo.

——Nouvelle édition. 2 tom. Paris, 1876, 8vo.

Notre Dame de Paris. Edition illustrée. Paris, 1877, 4to.

——Notre Dame; a tale of the "Ancient Régime" from the French of V. H., with a prefatory notice of his Romances. By the translator [W. Hazlitt]. 3 vols. London, 1833, 12mo.

——The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Translated, with a sketch of the life and writings of the author, by Frederic Shoberl. A new edition, revised. (*Standard Novels*, No. 32.) London, 1833, 8vo.

——La Esmeralda; or, the Hunchback of Notre Dame (*The Novelist*, vol. i.). London, 1839, 8vo.

——La Esmeralda; or, the Hunchback of Notre-Dame. London [1844], 8vo.

——Hunchback of Notre Dame (*Parlour Library*, vol. cli.). London [1857], 8vo.

——The Hunchback of Notre-Dame. Translated from the French by H. L. Williams. New York [1862], 8vo.

——Notre-Dame; or, the Bell-ringer of Paris. New copyright translation. London [1867], 8vo.

One of a series entitled "The Library of World-wide Authors."

——Notre-Dame; or, the Bell-ringer of Paris. With illustrations. London [1885], 8vo.

Quatrevingt-treize. [A novel.] 2 tom. Paris, 1874, 12mo.

——Another edition. Paris [1877], 8vo.

First illustrated edition.

——Ninety-Three. Translated by F. L. Benedict and J. H. Friswell. 3 vols. London, 1874, 8vo.

Notre Dame de Paris. Another edition. London [1885], 8vo.

——"Ninety-Three." Translated by Sir G. Campbell. London [1886], 8vo.

Le Rhin. Lettres à un ami. 2 tom. Paris, 1842, 8vo.

——Nouvelle édition. Augmentée d'un volume inédit. 4 tom. Paris, 1845, 8vo.

The first edition, 1842, contained only twenty-five letters, followed by the Conclusion. This edition concontains fourteen additional letters on Worms, Mannheim, Spire, Heidelberg, Alsace, and Switzerland.

——Excursions along the Banks of the Rhine. London, 1843, 8vo.

——The Rhine; from the French, by D. M. Aird. London, 1843, 12mo.

——Another edition, etc. London, 1853, 8vo.

Les Travailleurs de la Mer. 3 tom. Paris, 1866, 8vo.

——Les Travailleurs de la Mer. Illustrations de Daniel Vierge. Paris, 1876, 8vo.

Contains sixty-three woodcuts.

——Nouvelle édition. Illustrée. Paris, 1883, 4to.

——Les Travailleurs de la Mer. Adapted for use in schools, with notes, life, etc. By J. Boïelle. London, 1887, 8vo.

——Toilers of the Sea. Authorised English translation, by W. Moy Thomas. 3 vols. London, 1866, 8vo.

——Another edition. Two illustrations by G. Doré. London, 1867, 8vo.

——Another edition. London, 1870, 8vo.

——Another edition. London, 1886 [1885], 8vo.

William Shakespeare. Paris, 1864, 8vo.

——William Shakespeare. Authorised copyright English translation, by A. Baillot. London, 1864, 8vo.

——William Shakespeare. Translated by M. B. Anderson. Chicago, 1887, 8vo.

## IV. DRAMATIC WORKS.

Théâtre. 3 vols. Paris, 1841-47, 12mo.

——Another edition. 6 vols. Paris, 1858, 12mo.

——Another edition. 4 vols. Paris, 1867, 12mo.

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Angelo, tyran de Padoue, drame. Paris, 1835, 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1846, 8vo.

——Angelo: a tragedy [in four acts]. Rendered into English blank verse; with notes and some prefatory remarks on French dramatic poetry, by E. O. Coe. London, 1880, 8vo.

Les Burgraves, trilogie. Paris, 1843, 8vo.

Cromwell, drame [in five acts, and in verse]. Paris, 1827, 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1841, 12mo.

La Esmeralda, opéra en quatre actes, musique de Mlle. Louise Bertin, paroles de M. V. Hugo, etc. Paris, 1836, 8vo.

Hernani, ou l'honneur Castillan, drame [in five acts and in verse]. Paris, 1830, 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1846, 8vo.

——Hernani, drame en cinq actes [and in verse]. With explanatory notes, by G. Masson (*Le Théâtre Français du XIXe siècle*, No. 1). London [1876], 8vo.

——Catherine of Cleves, and Hernani: Tragedies, translated from the French of Mr. Alexandre Dumas and Mr. Victor Hugo, by Lord Francis Leveson Gower. London, 1832, 8vo.

Lucrèce Borgia, drame. Paris, 1833, 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1846, 8vo.

——Lucretia Borgia; a dramatic tale, translated from the French of V. H., by W. T. Haley. (*The Romancist*, vol. v., N.S.) London, 1842, 8vo.

Marie Tudor, drame. Paris [1833], 8vo.

In Renduel's Catalogue of 1833, this work, with the title "Marie d'Angleterre, ou souvent femme varie," is announced as being in the press. On the frontispiece of the original edition "Marie d'Angleterre" appears without the sub-title.

——Another edition. Paris, 1846, 8vo.

Marion de Lorme, drame [in five acts and in verse]. Paris, 1831, 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1846, 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1873, 8vo.

Le Roi s'amuse, drame [in five acts and in verse]. Paris, 1832, 8vo.

——Another edition. Paris, 1846, 8vo.

——Le Roi s'amuse. [A drama in five acts and in verse. Illustrated by H. Meyer, A. Marie, and others.] (Détail du procés du Roi s'amuse. Notes et Variantes de l'édition définitive, etc.) Paris, 1883, 4to.

150 copies printed.

——The King's Fool; or, Le Roi s'amuse. From the French of V. H. [Translated by W. T. Haley.] (*The Romancist*, vol. v., N.S.) London [1841 ?], 8vo.
——Le Roi s'amuse! A tragedy in five acts. Translated into English blank verse by F. L. Slous, and entitled Francis the First: or, the curse of St. Vallier. London, 1843, 8vo.
Privately printed.
Ruy Blas, drame en cinq actes. Paris, 1838, 18mo.
Théâtre en liberté. Paris, 1886, 8vo.
Torquemada. Drame [in a prologue and four acts, and in verse]. Paris, 1882, 8vo.

## V. MISCELLANEOUS.

Adolphe Pelleport. Tous les Amours, avec une lettre de Victor Hugo, etc. Paris, 1882, 18mo.
Cárlos Peñaranda. Cantos del Pueblo. Precedidos de una carta de V. H. Madrid, 1875, 8vo.
Centenaire de Voltaire, 30 Mai, 1878. Le Discours, pour Voltaire. La lettre à l'Évêqne d'Orléans. Paris, 1878, 8vo.
Ce que c'est que l'exil. Introduction au livre Pendant l'Exil. Paris, 1875, 8vo.
Contes de toutes les Couleurs par Edmond About, etc. Avec une Préface de Victor Hugo. Paris, 1879, 8vo.
Discours dans la discussion de loi sur la déportation. Paris [1849], 8vo.
Discours d'ouverture du Congrès Littéraire International. Le Domaine public payant. Paris, 1878, 8vo.
Discours prononcés à la Chambre des Pairs, à l'Assemblée nationale et au Congrès de la paix. Paris, 1851, 8vo.
Discours [on the liberty of the press] prononcé à Bruxelles. Londres [1862], 8vo.
Douze Discours. Paris, 1851, 8vo.
Quatorze Discours. Neuvième édition. Paris, 1851, 8vo.
Le Droit et la Loi. Introduction au livre, Actes et Paroles. Paris, 1875, 8vo.
Echoes of Harper's Ferry. By James Redpath. Boston, 1860, 8vo.
Contains two letters from V. H. on the attempted liberation of the Slaves by Capt. John Brown.
Frédéric Soulié, sa vie et ses ouvrages, suivi des discours prononcés sur sa tombe par MM. Victor Hugo, Paul Lacroix, et Antony Béraud. Par M. Champion. Paris, 1847, 12mo.
Les Génies de la Liberté, avec des lettres de George Sand, Victor Hugo, etc. Par Benjamin Gastineau. Paris, 1865, 12mo.
Charles Hugo. Les Hommes de l'Exil, précédés de Mes Fils par V. H. Paris, 1875, 12mo.
Le Christ au Vatican, suivi de la Voix de Guernesey. Bruxelles, 1868, 32mo.
——Christ and the Vatican. Translated from the French by G. Schlatter. With notes by the translator. Second edition. London, 1875, 16mo.
Ledru Rollin. Discours politiques et écrits divers. 2 tom. Paris, 1879, 8vo.
Vol. ii. contains the "Discours du Citoyen Victor Hugo" at the

inauguration of the Funeral Monument erected to Ledru Rollin at Père Lachaise.

Léon de Labessade. La Sémiramis Ailée, précédée d'une lettre de V. H. Paris, 1875, 8vo.

Mélanges par Victor Hugo, Louis Blanc, César Pascal, etc. Bruxelles, 1869, 8vo.
Contains *La Voix de Guernesey* (*Mentana*).

Mémoires de Garibaldi par Alexandre Dumas, précédés d'un discours sur Garibaldi par Victor Hugo, etc. Bruxelles [1860], 8vo.

Paris et Rome. Introduction au livre Depuis l'Exil. Paris, 1876, 8vo.

Paris-Guide par les principaux écrivains et artistes de la France. [Introduction by V. Hugo.] 2 pt. Paris, 1867, 12mo.

Pour un Soldat. [A plea for a soldier named Blanc, condemned to death for insubordination.] Paris, 1875, 8vo.
Reprinted from "Actes et Paroles."

Raccolta di lettere del Generale Garibaldi indirizzate a M. A. Sammito, precedute da due di F. D. Guerrazzi e continuate da altre di V. Hugo, etc. Milano [1882 ?], 8vo.

La servilité de la magistrature impériale sous le despotisme de Napoléon-le-Petit [*i.e.*, Napoleon III.]. Londres, 1871, 8vo.

Théophile Gautier par Charles Baudelaire. Notice littéraire précédée d'une lettre de Victor Hugo. Paris, 1859, 8vo.

En vente au bureau de L'Événement. Extrait de L'Événement. Discours de V. H. dans la discussion du projet de loi électorale. Paris, 1850, 8vo.

Visit of the Emperor of the French to England. [Translated from the French.] London, 1855, 8vo.

## VI. SELECTIONS.

Les Femmes de V. H. [with selections from his writings], par L. Beauvallet et C. Valette Illustrations, etc. Paris, 1862, etc., 8vo.

A few Translations from Victor Hugo and other poets. By Mary Charlotte Chavannes. London, 1886, 8vo.

Fleurs de Poésie Moderne. Tirées des Œuvres de A. de Lamartine, Victor Hugo, etc. Londres, 1834, 8vo.

Le Livre des Mères. Les Enfants. Vignettes par E. Froment. [Edited by P. J. Stahl, *pseud*—*i.e.*, Pierre J. Hetzel.] Paris [1877], 8vo.

Metrical Translations from the Works of Lamartine, Casimir Delavigne, Victor Hugo, etc. To which are added some Original Poems by the translator, Elizabeth Collins. Paris [1850 ?], 8vo.

La Peine de mort, jugée par V. H., et Lamartine. [Extracts from their writings.] Paris [1848], s. sh. fol.

Plus de Bourreau. [Extracts from the writings of V. H. and Lamartine.] Paris [1848], s. sh. fol.

The literary life and poetical works of V. Hugo. Translated into English by eminent authors. Now first collected and edited by H. L. Williams. New York [1883], 8vo.

Selections, chiefly lyrical, from the Poetical Works of Victor Hugo. Translated into English by various authors. Now first collected by H. W. Williams. (*Bohn's Standard Library.*) London, 1885, 8vo.

Translations in Verse. (The Child's Prayer: An Infant's Influence on the Family Circle, from V. H. Psalm i-viii., xcviii.) By H. Highton. London, 1873, 8vo.

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## VII. APPENDIX.

### Biography, Criticism, etc.

Albert, Paul.—Poëtes et Poésies. Paris, 1881, 8vo.
Victor Hugo, pp. 153-198.

Alexander, William, *Bishop of Derry.*—Victor Hugo as a Poet. (*Afternoon Lectures on Literature and Art, Sec. Ser.*) London, 1864, 8vo.

Allard, H. J.—"Een Genie" en "slechte Manieren in de Letterkunde" of de Fransche en Hollandsche Victor Hugo [*i.e.*, V. H. and J. Van Vloten], voor dezelfde rechtbank. (*Studien op Godsdienstig Gebied.* Jahr. 5.) S'Hertogenbosch, 1873, 8vo.

Asseline, Alfred.—Victor Hugo intime. Mémoires, Correspondances, Documents inédits. Paris, 1885, 8vo.

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——Seconde édition, etc. Paris, 1872, 8vo.

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Auterive, Louis d'.—Les Misérables et Victor Hugo, etc. Bruxelles, 1862, 8vo.

Banville, Théodore de.—Mes Souvenirs. Victor Hugo, Henri Heine, etc. Paris, 1882, 8vo.

Baour-Lormian, L. P.—Canon d'alarme. [Satire in verse on Victor Hugo.] Paris, 1829, 8vo.

Barbey d'Aurevilly, Jules.—Les Misérables de V. H. Paris, 1862, 8vo.

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——Victor Hugo; his life and works; from the French, by F. A. Shaw. Chicago, 1881, 16mo.

——Translated from the French by Ellen E. Frewer. London, 1882, 8vo.

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Barrili, A. G., and Panzacchi, E.—Vittor Hugo; saggi critici, etc. Milano, 1885, 8vo.

Beauvallet, L., and Valette, C. Les Femmes de V. H. [With selections from his writings] par L. Beauvallet et C. Valette [with V. H.'s biography.] Illustrations, etc. Paris, 1862, etc., 8vo.

Bérard-Varagnac, M. — Portraits Littéraires. Paris, 1887, 8vo.
Victor Hugo, pp. 77-129.

Bernier, E.—Du Caractère de l'Épopée dans La Légende des Siècles. Paris, 1886, 12mo.

Bic, J. P.—Maison Victor Hugo et Cie, 1842 et 1871. Poésies satiriques. Paris, 1871, 8vo.

Biré, Edmond.—Victor Hugo et la Restauration ; étude historique et littéraire. Paris, 1869, 12mo.

——Victor Hugo avant 1830. Paris, 1883, 8vo.

Blanchet, Eugène.—Victor Hugo et la Renaissance Théâtrale au XIXe siècle. Hernani—Ruy Blas. Meaux, 1879, 8vo.

Blémont, Émile.—Le Livre d'Or de Victor Hugo par l'élite des artistes et des écrivains contemporains. Direction de E. B. [Illustrated.] Paris, 1883, 4to.

Bouvenne, Aglaiis. — 1827-1879. Victor Hugo, ses portraits et ses charges, catalogués par A. B. Paris, 1879, 12mo.

Brandes, Georg.—Die Litteratur des neunzehnten Jahr-hunderts, etc. Leipzig, 1882, etc, 8vo.
Numerous references to V. Hugo.

Brigny, A. de.—Pape contre Pape, ou le Pape de V. Hugo et le Pape de l'Eglise. Paris, 1878, 12mo.

Brunetière, F.—Histoire et Littérature. Paris, 1885, 8vo.
Contains an article, " Hugo avant 1830."

Buchanan, Robert. — Master-Spirits. London, 1873, 8vo.
Hugo in 1872, pp. 143-167.

——A Poet's Sketch-Book ; selections from the prose writings of R. B. London, 1883, 8vo.
Victor Hugo, pp. 157-164.

Buchanan, Robert.—A Look round Literature. London, 1887, 8vo.
From Æschylus to Victor Hugo, pp. 1-53.

Camerini, Eugenio.—Profili Letterari. Firenze, 1870, 8vo.
Vittor Hugo, pp. 280-300.

Cappon, James.—Victor Hugo ; a Memoir and a Study. Edinburgh, 1885, 8vo.

Castille, Hippolyte.--Victor Hugo. (*Portraits Politiques au dix-neuvième siècle*, No. 15.) Paris, 1857, 16mo.

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Chépet, Eugene. — Les Poëtes Français, etc. 4 tom. Paris, 1861, 8vo.
Victor Hugo, by Charles Baudelaire, tom iv., pp. 265-287.

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Claretie, Jules.—La Libre Parole, etc. Paris, 1868, 8vo.
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——Victor Hugo. (*Célébrités Contemporaines*, Part 1.) Paris, 1882, 8vo.

Courtat, Félix.—Étude sur les Misérables de M. V. Hugo. Paris, 1862, 8vo.

Cuvillier-Fleury.—Études et Portraits. Paris, 1865, 8vo.
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Dabas, J. Ch. — À propos de Shakespeare ou le nouveau livre de Victor Hugo. Bordeaux, 1864, 8vo.

Dairnvaell, G. M. — Prédictions extraordinaires du grand Abracadabra, découvert dans les odes et ballades de V. Hugo, par G. M. D. Paris, 1842, 32mo.

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## VIII. CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF WORKS.

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| Actes et Paroles | 1875-6 |
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| Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit | 1881 |
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